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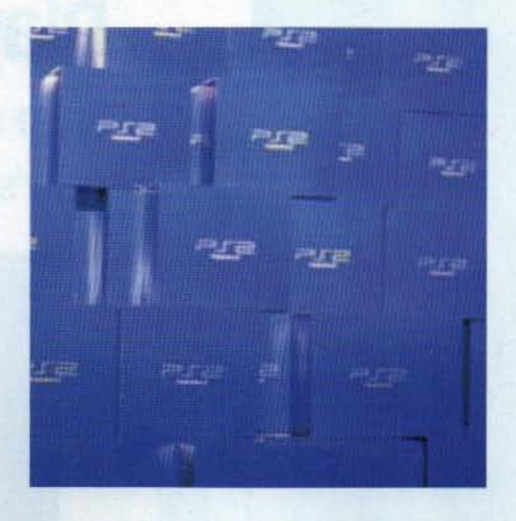
EDGE

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The second coming: power to the people or false prophecy?





Despite its notoriously harsh work ethics, Japan likes to be entertained. Letting off steam is a national pastime. But entertainment is not without order. J-League football matches between the likes of Shimizu's S-Pulse and Yokohama's F Marinos do not incite beer-sodden battles on the terraces, for example. No, order on a general scale remains the envy of just about every western nation. Which is why the intervention of Tokyo's police force in Akihabara on March 4, PlayStation2's launch day, is especially remarkable. Consumer demand had risen to such outrageous proportions that, even having resorted to issuing supermarket delicatessen-style service tickets to clamouring punters, shop proprietors in Tokyo's neon-spitting consumer electronics districts were left with little option than to call for help. Hardcore gamers are one thing; masses of unruly youths who'd happily trample each other underfoot if it meant getting an inch closer to getting their hands on Sony's hot new silicon are quite another.

Some Japanese gameheads camped out in freezing cold conditions for days prior to March 4. Sony's Japanese Web site collapsed under the weight of hundreds of thousands of hits per minute when it was announced that online reservations would be taken for PS2 units. Two days after going on sale, 980,000 blue boxes had been shifted. In videogaming's short history, there has never been a console launch like this.

But then there has never been a machine whose specs and aesthetics and software support and market positioning and future promise and outlandish hype mix to form such a formidable brew that every other gaming hardware manufacture must look on and, if only fleetingly, consider packing it all in.

But the fear remains that PlayStation2 is a matter of all gong and no dinner. Certainly, coming to the table right now sees scant few software titles worth snaffling up. The real work for Sony and its army of partners starts here.

Contacts

Editorial

Future Publishing
30 Monmouth Street
Bath, BANES, BA1 2BW

Telephone: 01225 442244
Editorial fax: 01225 732275
Email: edge@futurenet.co.uk
Edge Website: www.edge-online.com

Advertising and recruitment:
emma.lewis@futurenet.co.uk
Telephone: 0171 317 2604
Fax: 0171 486 5678

Subscriptions

Future Publishing Ltd
FREEPOST BS4900, Somerton
Somerset TA11 6BR
Telephone customer services:
01458 271112
Telephone customer order line:
01458 271112
Fax: 01225 822523
Email: subs@futurenet.co.uk

People on Edge

Tony Mott editor
João Sanches deputy editor
Alex Morss operations editor
Mark Walbank writer
David McCarthy writer
Christophe Kagotani Tokyo bureau
Terry Stokes art editor
Darren Phillips deputy art editor

Emma Lewis advertising manager
Neil Abraham business dev manager
Rob Silverman classified sales executive
Craig Broadbridge production coordinator
Lou Reffell production manager
Production fax 01225 732293
Caroline Coles ad design
Beccy Stables print services coordinator
Judith Green group production manager
Rachel Spurrier pre-press coordinator
Simon Windsor, **Mark Gover**,
Chris Power foreign licensing
Jackie Garford publisher
Rob Price group publisher
Jane Ingham managing director
Greg Ingham chief executive

Colour reproduction

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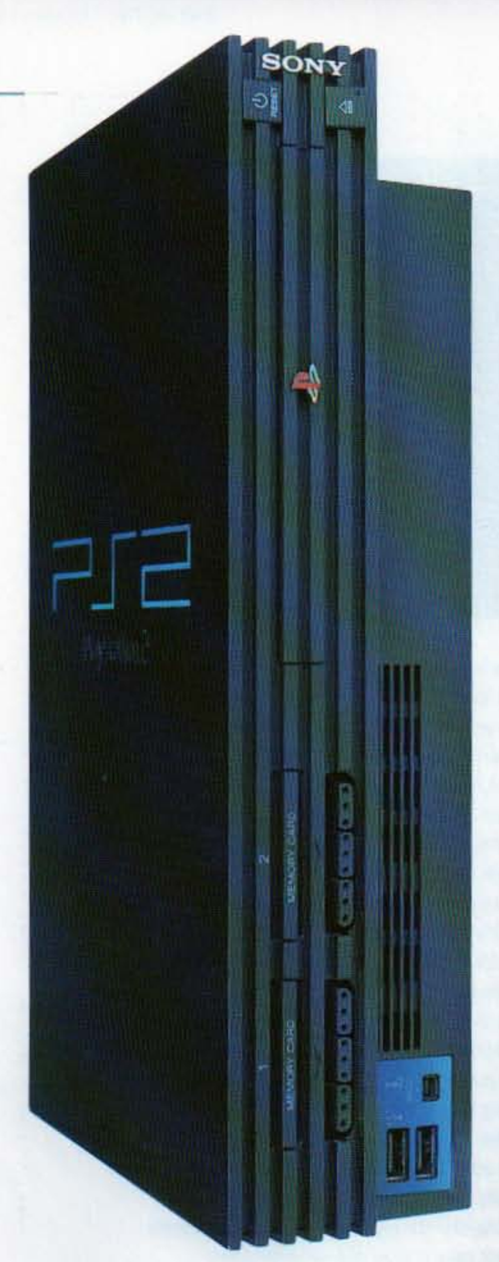
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PlayStation2 06

Edge reports from Japan as Sony's superconsole goes live

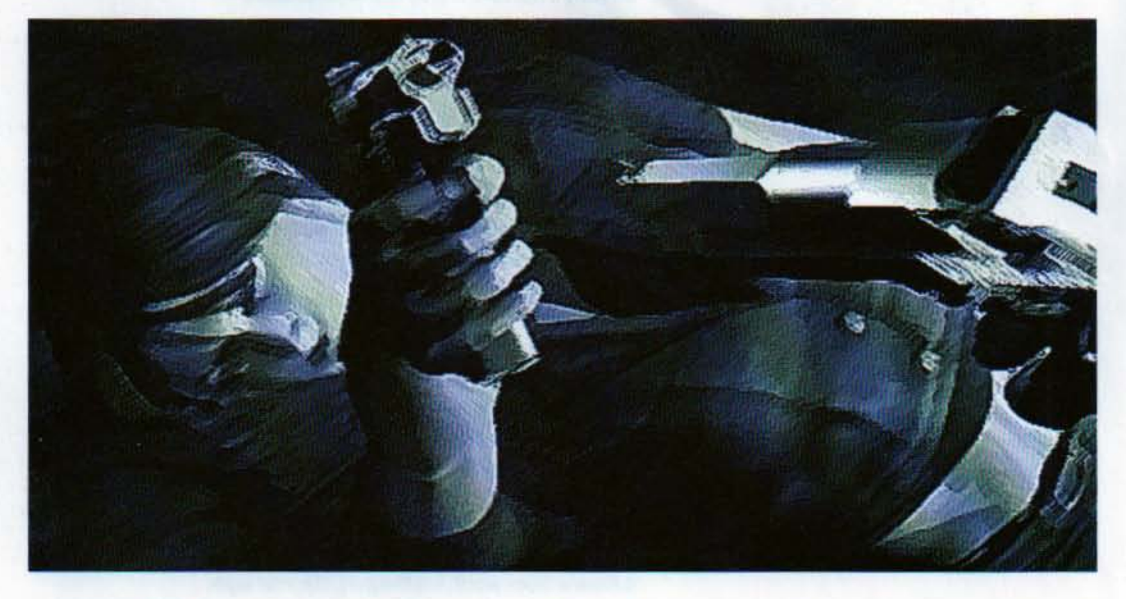






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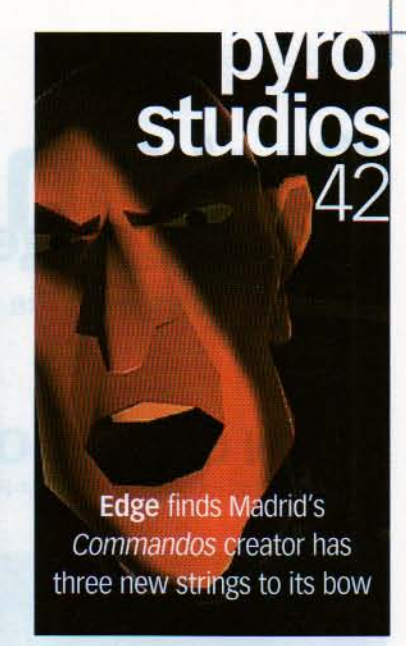
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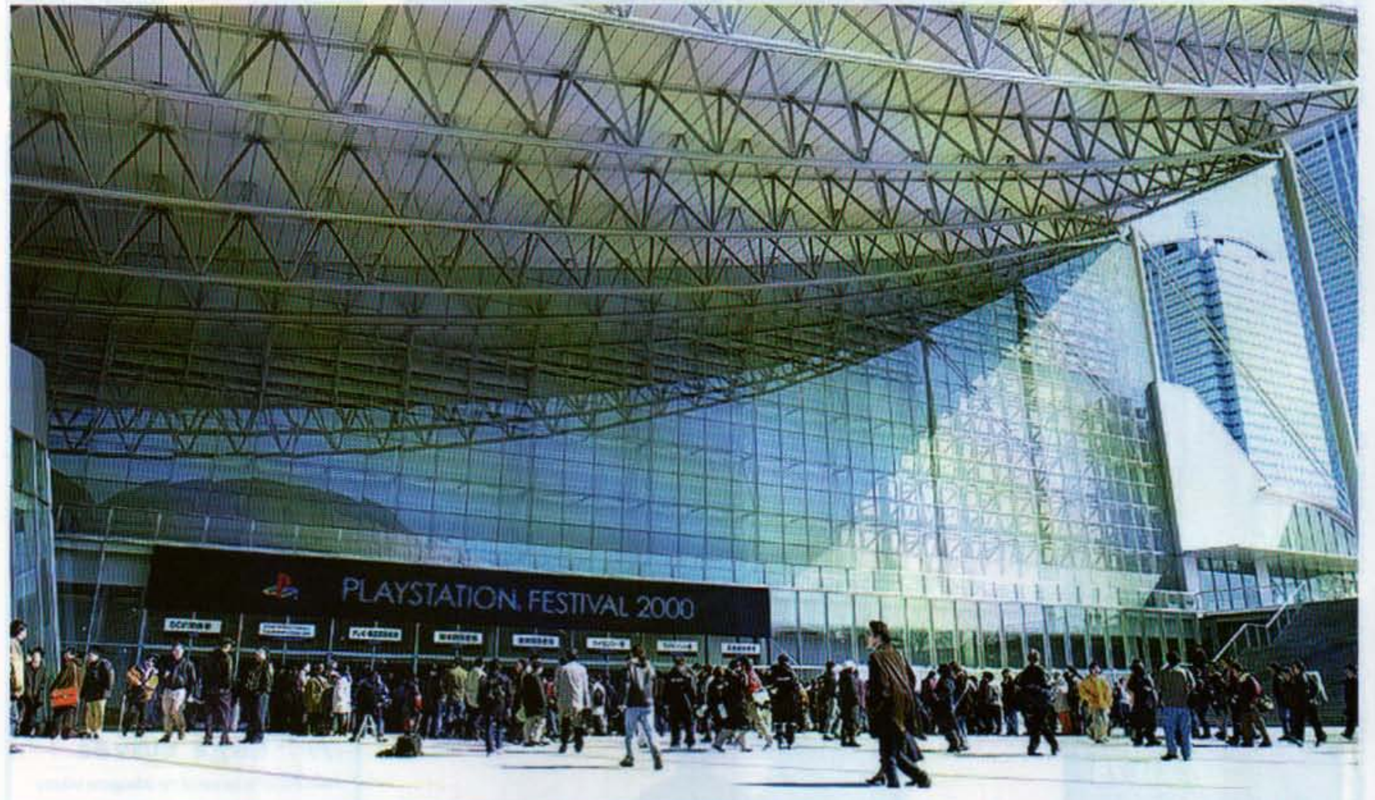
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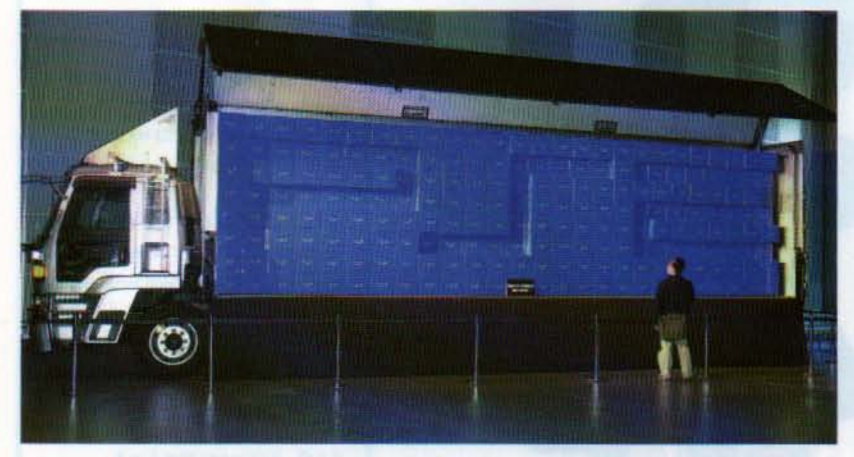
The latest news from the world of interactive entertainment

JAPAN GORGES ON PS2 FOLLOWING SLICK SONY SHOW

Having sampled its delights at end-of-February event, the east's most fanatical gamers can't buy PS2 soon enough



Interest in the festival was fairly healthy, but gave no real indication of the retail PS2 mania that would follow



A lorry packed full of (empty) PS2 boxes was a clever touch at the Festival, offering a kind of 'ready and waiting' message to anyone doubting SCEI's commitment to deliver on March 4

PlayStation2 launched to a rapturous Japanese reception on March 4, with demand for the console stirring consumer interest to levels of frenzy not witnessed since 1990, when Nintendo released its Super Famicom.

A few weeks earlier had seen Tokyo's Makuhari Messe Convention Centre play host to the PlayStation Festival 2000, an event aimed at letting the press and public get hands-on experience of forthcoming PS2 software.

The hall featured 500 PS2-equipped demo pods linked to 28-inch Sony Wega widescreen displays which were grouped into 22 stations, showcasing 27 titles. *Ridge Racer V*, *SF EX3*, *Tekken Tag Tournament* and *GT2000* gathered the biggest crowds, while *Kessen* and Square's *Gekikokan* baseball game were also well received. Of the remainder,













Though SCEE claimed that attendance figures for the three-day event reached 50,000 over the two public days – around 22,500 on Saturday, with 24,500 the following day – there were times when the Makuhari Messe hall seemed barren

As expected, it wasn't difficult to find disappointing software, with many titles simply graphically enhanced interpretations of current PS titles. Four different mah jong titles offered nothing remarkable

Driving Emotion Type-S probably came out in front, despite sporting a delicate handling system that had many western attendees cursing the Dual Shock 2 joypads.

Flat updates

As expected, it wasn't difficult to find disappointing software, with many titles simply graphically enhanced interpretations of current PlayStation titles. None of the four mah jong titles on display offered anything remarkable, while Enix's *The O Story* appeared to draw inspiration from Pauline Reage's *Story Of O* erotic novel, but with even less significant social comment – and clearly executed from a male perspective.

Meanwhile, EA's *Snowboarding SuperCross* suffered horrific framerate fluctuation, both of the pool games failed to engage (though at least Ask's version used the Dual Shock 2's analogue buttons for shot strength – then made it redundant by also offering analogue stick control), *American Arcade* was a good demonstration of how not to do pinball games, *IQ Remix+* looked as bland as its predecessors, and *DrumMania* and *Stepping Selection*'s rhythm action gameplay amused visitors with plastic drum kits and pressure-sensitive mats respectively.

Sports games were fairly well represented, although T&E Soft's *Golf Paradise* far from revolutionised the genre and Konami's *Jikkyou World Soccer 2000* was a severe disappointment. At least the seventh instalment of the company's cute, colourful *Power Pro Baseball* series contrasted favourably with Square's more sombre approach.

Elsewhere, Artdink's *A6* kept frustrated train conductors and architects immersed, *Evergrace* offered dreary



Inside PS2 boxes users will find a Dual Shock 2 joypad, composite video cable, an 8Mb memory card, plus a utility disc which carries DVD-handling data





Jaleco's *Stepping Selection* offered '80s 'classics' such as 'Footloose' played over MPEG2 background video (left). Although few of the titles impressed, at the time of writing Japan is seriously affected by PS2 fever

PS2 in detail

As Edge went to press, the PS2 launch had only just happened, but the magazine's Japanese correspondent has reported back with details of hardware modes that Sony had previously denied would be included. The finished unit allows PS1 games to be run on it in an enhanced mode (using filtering to soften jaggies) and loaded up to around 50 per cent faster. **Edge** will be testing the machine in full next month.









The start-up sequence is rather sexy, exuding a kind of deep-space look, while the set-up menu allows some options found on DVD players, such as screen ratio size but also visual output and language selection



Perhaps it was because they were new, but Edge felt the analogue sticks on Dual Shock 2 joypads were far stiffer than normal PS joypads (above). The PS2 console will happily stand by itself, but many users will purchase the dedicated 'feet' unit (attached, right) which is available to buy separately

RPG action adventure, while *Eternal Ring* managed to make PS2 turn in a great Dreamcast impression. At least SCEI's *Fantavision* and *Be On Edge* were more radical conceptual departures from the norm. The former surprised many with its addictive mix of firework display and complex *Missile Command*-like gameplay, while the latter offered depth not usually associated with the usual blend of rhythm action.

Glitch hitches

Most titles at the Festival looked some way off completion, exhibiting unstable code. Over the three days, **Edge** noticed several games locking up or crashing, requiring a gentle press of the PS2's reset button to redeem matters (a hole in the pods' casing had even been made for this purpose). While some titles appeared free of bugs, others were suffering terribly. Konami's soccer title, in particular, refused to play the second half of matches with regular frequency. And most games bore shamefully long loading times – *Driving Emotion Type-S* probably being the biggest culprit.

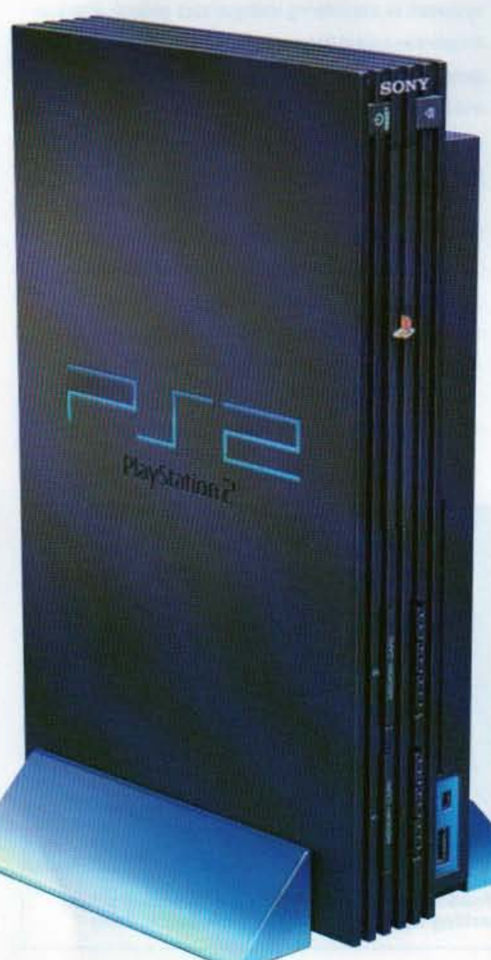
Over the event's three days, the main stage played host to a selection of Japanese developers, PS2-related discussion panels, and demos of the machine's out-of-the-box options. After setting the time and date, as with all DVD players you're given the choice of 16:9 widescreen aspect or the more traditional 4:3 ratio. You also select output type (eg RGB) and have the option to display the set-up menu in English.



Maximo, an evolution of *Ghouls 'n' Ghosts*, was Capcom's most interesting new announcement

To demonstrate PS2's backwards compatibility, on the Friday (press day) a PlayStation1 game was inserted in the drive and crashed soon after the appearance of the PS1 title screen. On subsequent days the presenters didn't bother progressing past the title screen stage, instead moving swiftly on to the next presentation.

Most titles at the Festival looked some way off completion, exhibiting unstable code. Over the three days, Edge noticed several games locking up or crashing, requiring a gentle press of the reset button to proceed



The hottest softs

The most significant appearances on the main stage were showreels of newly announced and latest sequences from forthcoming software. *Maximo* (working title), a *Ghouls 'n' Ghosts* follow-up benefiting from Susumu Matsushita's superb character design, was one of a handful of Capcom communiques made at the show (a PS2 version of *Biohazard* also stood out). Only characters displayed against blank backgrounds were shown, though their animation offered a rough indication of the game's eventual quality. *Gun Griffon Blaze* also looked visually pleasing, though nothing that current PCs wouldn't be able to achieve, while *Slipheed* continued the series' love of gorgeous prerendered action.

Predictably, Tecmo showcased a PS2 version of *Dead Or Alive 2* which looked cleaner and more detailed than the Dreamcast interpretation. SCEI's internal studio, Deep Space, unveiled *Extermination*, an unimpressive panic action game which is still early in development. Slightly more excitement followed with *Armored Core 2*, while *L'Arc-en-Ciel* appeared as little more than DVD-feature-exploiting promo material for the popular Japanese music group of the same name. *Dark Cloud* was easily the most impressive title seen during the 40-minute show, offering insanely detailed visual depth.



Tecmo unveiled PS2 footage of *Dead or Alive 2* (see Alphas) to a suspiciously excited crowd of journalists





The O Story (top) takes videogaming into an unusual realm. *Gun Griffon Blaze* (above) doesn't

The show must go on

In terms of attendance, PlayStation Festival 2000 was a strangely sobering experience – busy around lunchtime on Saturday, but with crowds dissipating soon after. Sunday's audience never got anywhere near shoulder-brushing levels. In fact, by 2pm the show floor was looking embarrassingly vacant. It may have been a reflection of a current lack of apathy among Japan's videogame community, though **Edge** believes PS2's arrival should kickstart the market. Walking around Tokyo's Akihabara stores revealed strong support for the console: whenever PS2 software footage was shown a mesmerised crowd soon assembled.

With March 4 attracting hysterical consumer interest, it became clear that Sony's biggest step in realising its 128bit dream was a success: PS2 has hit hard and big.





PS2 merchandise proved popular – jackets sold out on both days. Square and Disney join hands (above)

PS2 DVD on test

Using 'The Matrix' as a benchtest, PlayStation2's DVD playback capability was given a fanfare-like airing at PlayStation Festival 2000 – but the results were disappointing. A surprising amount of visual grain and digital artefacts, including severe pixellation, were noticeable on almost every sequence **Edge** witnessed. Colour stability, too, was dubious. These failings can be partly put down to far-from-optimal level settings and connections linking the console to Sony's 28-inch Wega widescreen TVs, but most of these defects can only be attributed to the transfer quality of the actual DVD disc or the player.



Many stores in Akihabara were playing Japanese Region 2 versions of 'The Matrix' DVD on a variety of TV/player combinations, without the digital artefacts seen at the festival. Edge will carry a conclusive report on the machine's DVD ability next month

Disney goes PS2

Square has announced a new partnership with Disney, involving joint development of a PS2 title. Square's Tetsuya Nomura (of *Final Fantasy* fame) will work with Disney's internal creative team. New characters may feature alongside existing Disney names. The Japanese team is expected to concentrate on 3D technology and game design, with Disney set to provide manufacturing, creative content and distribution support.

The title is expected to reach Japanese stores by the end of 2001, while the west will have to wait until the following year.

The deal was announced at a press conference hosted by Square CEO Tomoyuki Takechi, director of character design Tetsuya Nomura, senior VP of software development Shinji Hashimoto, Disney president Jan Smith, senior vice president Steve Finney and international vice president Dave Lowrie.

Only four brief sequences, featuring Disney's Goofy character, were shown as a demonstration of the quality of the final production. The animation was of a high standard, with limb movement and facial expression particularly cartoon-like. Graphical detail impressed, though attendees would have preferred something closer to a real game environment than blank backgrounds.







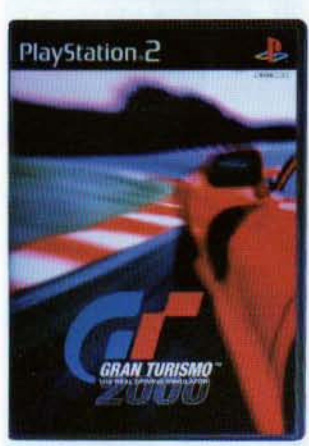
SONY PREPARES PS2 FOR RICH, HARDCORE EURO GAMERS

Broadband networks take a back seat as Sony Computer Entertainment Europe begins making plans for PAL PlayStation2

Going to market

Sony is the first manufacturer to tackle having two very different, viable machines on sale. Differentiating the consoles and games in their marketing, packaging and at retail will be difficult – parents simply cannot think that *Gran Turismo 2000* will run on their son's old grey box. There's a chance that, as in Japan, jewel cases could make way for something new (below).

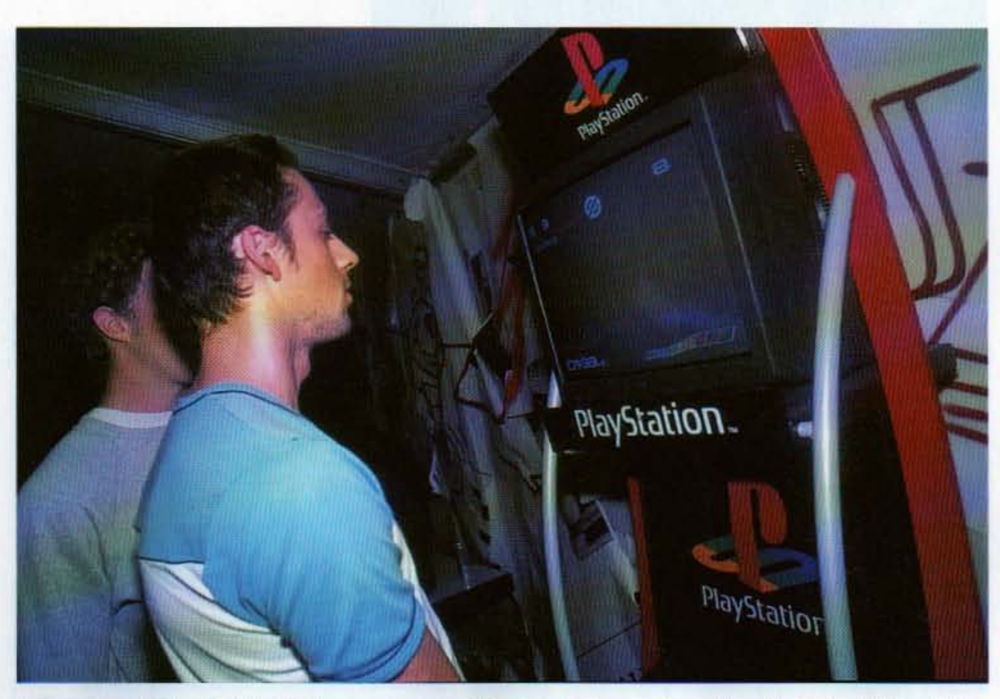
As for e-commerce, Sony UK hasn't decided whether or not to push sales over the Internet as in Japan. "We don't want to go up against retail, we want to find the best way to get the most out of all routes to market," says McGuire.



PlayStation lives

Sony anticipates PlayStation1 will remain on the market for at least a couple more years. "There are still good products coming out and there's close to 5.5m units installed in the UK," says McGuire. "That's a good marketplace to develop for."

As for PS2's backwards compatibility, it's as much a selling point for the first PlayStation as for the second. "Backwards compatibility shows respect for everybody," says Welsman. "If I go out and buy a PS2, whether I ever play any of my old games is a moot point."



Sony famously installed PlayStation demo pods at club and festival venues throughout the UK in a bid to win the attention of 'new' gamers. It worked – but the Euro PS2 strategy will see Sony targeting age groups, not lifestyles

After all the hype, Sony UK will put digital networks and connectivity to one side and sell PlayStation2 as a games machine for hardcore gamers when it launches this autumn. UK MD **Ray McGuire** says the message will promote PS2 as the "best games machine ever" with the ability to evolve into the centre of home computer entertainment.

Sony hasn't abandoned its ambition to use PS2 to drive its vision of focusing on digital networks. It says the problem is that the broadband infrastructure doesn't exist yet. "We would only disappoint people if we told them those people to put in the broadband infrastructure." There is unlikely to be any push on broadband for at least a year.

Countdown conundrum

With as little as six months to launch day, Sony Europe is carefully monitoring the Japanese debut. Information on the masses who bought their console through Japan's PlayStation.com site is being added to its own ongoing research to provide a snapshot of early adopters.

Monitoring demand will allow Sony to predict how many units it can shift at launch in Europe, although production issues could restrict the numbers available.

'There's no question that you'll have to be either dedicated or rich to get into Play Station2 in the first place. You're paying a premium to be there first'

"We don't know how many we're going to get," reveals McGuire. "But if we look at the launch of PlayStation1 where we did just over 20,000 units, and look at the sales of other competitive products in this area, I think we can do substantially more. I'd like to say at least ten times more."

With PAL production not yet up to full speed, what PS2 will cost is at the centre of speculation. Currency fluctuations will also affect the final decision. E3 seems the logical time to make the price announcement, but they were going to be playing *GT 2000* head to head in real time because they can't do that yet," admits McGuire.

And in a veiled attack on Sega's inconsistent promises, he points out: "It's interesting that some people are trying to say that it is here. We're producing the best you can get. Do consumers look at that and say, 'Yeah, I understand that they've got a problem with broadband infrastructures' or do they just say 'That product's crap'? You have to make sure you have integrity in delivering what you're going to deliver.

"We're in the hands of Cable & Wireless, NTL and

PlayStation 2 Vs X-Box

PlayStation1 saw off Saturn, but can its sequel handle the Death Star? Sony UK thinks PS2 is a stronger proposition to go into battle with the X-Box. "We've got better support and a really good chance of being the number one format," argues Welsman. "Microsoft's business is still 80 per cent business to business. Microsoft is a different animal and is perceived as a different animal by consumers. The brand doesn't stand for entertainment."

Welsman realises that Gates' company has no games infrastructure and is still subject to a probe by the US Justice department. "Having said that, you never know, it could come down to an America-versus-Japanese perspective or it could come down to PC versus the console fraternity. The PC community has been quite snobbish about consoles in the past. It might think Microsoft's console is the way to go."

But Sony will spend if it has to. "We've never been afraid of investing heavily into the PlayStation project," vows McGuire.

marketing director **Alan Welsman** believes the final date is unimportant. "We'll be strong enough to make the news," he says. Sony will put the machine out this autumn whatever the cost or the initial stock quantities. "I'd rather get out on the marketplace and get the machine into as many people's hands as I can," he adds.

"There's no question that you'll have to be either dedicated or rich to get into it in the first place. You're paying a premium to be there first."





PS2 will hit Europe this autumn whatever the cost or stock quantities, assures Sony's Alan Welsman (left). UK MD Ray McGuire (right) predicts that, at launch, PS2 will sell ten times more than PS1 did

Unwrapping the black box

Whatever the price, selling some 200,000 consoles at launch will be less ambitious with great software. McGuire hasn't decided yet what titles will be there at launch. He'd like to match the PS1's original six and says ten would be "fantastic."

"The average consumer wants to buy four games at launch, so I'd love to see four really good games – a good beat 'em up, a good racing game, a good RPG – and we've got all these," he believes. What PS2 will certainly do is play DVDs. "People are aware it's a DVD machine," Welsman agrees. "But how high or low it figures is still to be decided."

He points out that with only around 350,000 DVD players in the UK, PS2 has a chance of quickly outstripping hardware players. But he cautions that people buying into the true potential of DVD are also looking at purchasing all the audio equipment that goes with it.

"It's a bigger conversation than just plugging in a games machine," he notes, as DVD is a straightforward technology compared to some of PS2's more specialised communication capabilities such as USB, IEEE and PCMCIA. But Sony is not planning to emphasise these features to early adopters.

But while broadband and connectivity lie too far in the future for the early marketing push, 'emotional' games are perhaps just a generation of software away. "It's going to happen but you can't quite see where it's coming from," says Welsman. "Initial games like *The Bouncer* won't be a sea change but they will alter people's perceptions a little bit," he continues. "Emotion is about narrative and plot, not about people's faces changing. The character's faces being able to acknowledge emotion will be the first staging post."

And for those who chastise Sony for breeding mass-market complacency, he says: "We're all in it together. It's not Sony's total responsibility to create new genres. We're offering a machine that's powerful enough to enable developers to go out and do that, but after that it's down to them."

"I want my PS2"

Welsman anticipates PS2's UK launch will be backed up by the same marketing spend as for PlayStation1 – around £20m. Hype this summer is inevitable, but beyond that the campaign is undecided. Welsman isn't convinced that even PS2's graphical stunners are ready to take the limelight in adverts in the way stars in movie trailers do. What marketing types call 'below the line' activity also remains undecided.

Edge's sister publication *Official PlayStation Magazine* has won another year for its PS1 licence, although Welsman says that Sony might decide not to make an official PS2 magazine happen. Elsewhere, he's in talks about creating a PS2 youth TV programme.

One novel problem for Sony is controlling media speculation. While 'nobody' wanted to talk to Sony about the first PlayStation, everyone from *The Daily Mail* to men's lifestyle magazines are running often spurious articles on its successor.

"At some point you have to put your stake in the ground and say no, this is what we're going to do. If gossip continues after that, then so be it," says Welsman. Full launch plans, including price, date and initial titles are expected in May.

Still cool for clubs?

Welsman is less a fan of Sony's masterful positioning of PlayStation than many pundits are. "People have looked back retrospectively and said we tried to make PlayStation the cool game console," he laments.

"We [only] went into nightclubs because 16 to 24-year-olds went there. The truth is, Sega went in before we did. What happened was games became acceptable – 50 per cent through Sony and 50 per cent natural dynamics of the consumer changing. It was happening any way."

But even if the chemical generation made PlayStation part of its scene, is it a danger that there's no similar zeitgeist in the air right now?

"It's not a danger but it's something we've got to be aware of," acknowledges Welsman. "The big danger would be to carry on doing the same thing now. It doesn't mean we don't identify early adopters – but it means that maybe clubs are not necessarily the way."

MILIA HEARS WAP MOBILES RING THE CHANGES

Sega takes centre stage in Cannes while handheld comms devices provide intangible industry buzz



E3 and even ECTS are bearpits compared with the palm trees and chilly hotel pools of Cannes, where Milia delegates from across technologies mix among a more sharing atmosphere than at other industry events

The Milia d'Or Awards 2000
(Sundance it is not)

Best action game: **Half-Life**

Best adventure/RPG: **Silent Hill**

Best strategy game: **Age of Empires II**

Best simulation/sports game: **FIFA 2000**

Best online game: **Ultima Online: The Second Age**

Best family entertainment: **Mario Party**

Strong on hyperbole, short on products, that was Milia 2000 – and it was all the better for it. With technology from shopping and broadcasting to games being wrapped together by the development of high-speed networks, Milia's decade-old 'convergence' mantra is finally becoming reality. After years of hype, the 7,000-plus delegates from across these industries at last have something to say to each other in the bars of Cannes at night.

But what was there for gamers? This was the French festival's most concerted attempt yet to court videogaming, but the results were unconvincing. Sega's Shoichiro Irimajiri and Brazil's star footballer Ronaldo made a splash, but the rank-and-file and the big announcements stayed away. Irimajiri made a keynote speech outlining (again) Sega's plans for a broadband network; its ultra-fast proprietary Net sounds fantastic but won't arrive until 2003.

Sega also demonstrated its more immediate peripheral, the Dreameye. This digital camera can be used for video conferencing via two Dreamcasts and also as a portable digital snapper. It will come bundled with photo-editing software and should be available in the Europe by Christmas (price TBA). Sega also took delight in showing *Tomb Raider* and confirming that *Black & White* is heading to Dreamcast.

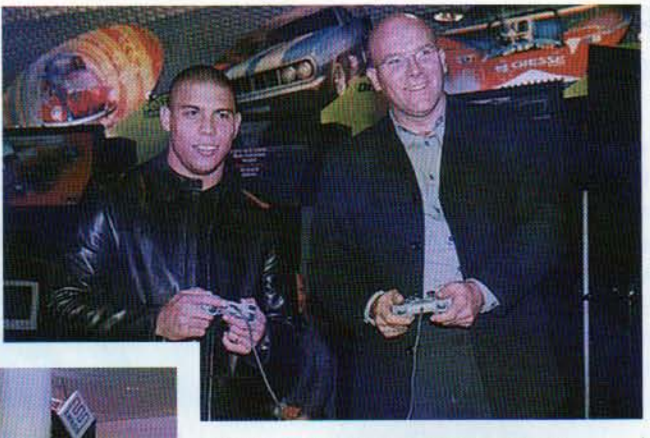


Organisers of Milia 2000, which took place at the Palais des Festivals, claimed that more than 2,500 companies attended this year's February show in Cannes. Next year it will grow further

Not all Sega

Away from the blue swirl, games news was scarce. Relic Entertainment revealed a *Homeworld* expansion pack to come from Barking Dog Studios. *Homeworld: Cataclysm* will introduce a new non-human foe and offer entirely new fleets of ships and research.

Infogrames showed off *Ronaldo V-Football* with a live appearance by the man himself (the Palais des Festivals usually has to wait for Hollywood to arrive in summer to enjoy such crowds). Interesting to **Edge** was a playable version of *Halo* on the Take Two stand. The game remains a mystery, but as a technology demo it still seems Bungie is working two years ahead of everyone else. Indicative of this is its physics: ejected shell-casings fly out completely



Infogrames chief Bruno Bonnell could not resist showing off his star signing, Ronaldo

Around 600 developers registered at the show, including 40 companies at the developer village

differently if you fire a weapon underwater or on land.

Most of the show floor was given over to technology companies. Net Quartz demonstrated client/server style piracy protection for stand alonegames. It takes a small but critical section of code and stores it remotely, so it must be downloaded at run time. Sinister? Perhaps, but also the stuff of the future. Peach Networks goes one step further, taking old CD-ROM program and converting them for use in on-demand digital cable TV.

Milia's organisers said that 600 developers registered on entering the show. Of these, 40 companies were found at the developer village including **Edge** competition winner Nalin Sharma and his addictive puzzler, *Cubic Juggler*. While Sharma and others expressed satisfaction at attendance, there was a display of creative apathy at the one-day-long Developer Day conference. Here, a string of big names including Ian Livingstone, Demis Hassabis and Martin Kenwright imparted their wisdom to just a dozen or so foreign media journalists and a handful of developers. They'd expected triple figures. The Think.Tank conference, which took place before the show, was better attended, with seminars on everything from e-commerce to broadband.

One key technology to emerge and was WAP mobile phones. With graphical displays set to improve dramatically and the benefits of connectivity offsetting typically weak CPUs, some developers suggest that connected gaming could yet belong to Nokia, not Nintendo. The strength of Milia is generating such a buzz. In technology, Milia could yet find its voice.

Milia: Cecillion defends delays

Don't rush us and we'll deliver is message from Sega boss

While other companies merely talked at Milia, Sega surprised visitors by showing off a smart new peripheral – the Dreameye digital camera. Speaking to **Edge** after making a dawn videoconferencing call to Tokyo to demonstrate Dreameye, Sega's European boss **JF Cecillion** revealed that more such devices are in production.

"We have R&D teams working night and day on technology and things like these cameras," he said. There will be more devices to talk to you about in the next few months." Sega's president Shoichiro Irimajiri had earlier revealed that the company's high-speed global broadband network wouldn't be ready for years.

"It takes a long time to get it right," Cecillion explained. "I guess the money involved, the partners involved, the technology involved and the strategy, which has to be developed – all that came at the same time as the launch of Dreamcast."

The Sega boss reacted sharply to the suggestion that Sega is dragging its heels in providing online gaming. Five months after launch it is still not possible to play a single game against another UK Dreamcast owner, let alone the six billion potential opponents alluded to in the infamous advertising campaign.

But Cecillion insisted: "I certainly never told them they'd have online games on day one. I always said that online games were something that would happen in time. Dreamcast is an evolutionary machine. Evolutionary means we don't put all our eggs in the first basket. We want to keep consumers interested. I'm very annoyed with that sort of attitude which consists of 'several hundred thousand people are happy with the positioning, one or two guys are not happy, can you expand for these one or two guys'."

Cecillion pointed out that Dreamcast now has a globally installed base of 4.5m consoles. He hoped some – notably EA – would see the console's continuing success as reason to re-evaluate the platform. "Every day I say to myself, why don't we have EA?" he admitted. "Frankly, I don't know what I can do more than selling more Dreamcasts. I'm not asking them to port 20 games. I'm just saying to have a presence for DC, even for EA,



can't do any harm." But while the console continues to sell strongly in the US, sales are flat in Europe.

That's prompted some to suggest a price cut. Others blame PAL stock shortages. But Cecillion dismissed such clamouring, pointing out that at launch £199 was widely applauded as a sensible price. He said the arrival of Sony's machine wouldn't affect the pricepoint and said he had his own date in mind for any future price reduction. "It has to be part of more than just one announcement about the pricing," Cecillion stressed. "It's a matter of more marketing investment – the day you put the price down, the paradox is you have to spend more money to bring people to the stores."

The upcoming arrival of Microsoft in the gaming arena doesn't concern Cecillion unduly either. "Of course X-Box is a competitor," he said. "But today our competitors aren't only Sony or Nintendo or the forthcoming X-Box. On the Internet we've got a lot of competitors – a lot of portals are competing with us for entertainment. The competition goes far beyond the hardware manufacturers now."

He stressed that while other people were still talking numbers, he had a solid machine out in the shops. "As long as you don't see a machine, the specifics of how it works, the pricepoint and the launch date, everything is still up in the air," he added. "What's surprising is that even in Japan, two weeks before the launch, retailers don't know how Sony will launch its console."

INFOGRAMES CHIEF CALLS FOR GAMES SHRINKAGE

"On average our games are too long, too big, too fat," **Bruno Bonnell** tells Emerging Technology Conference



Microsoft was co-sponsor of the Emerging Technology Conference

Games should be cheaper and smaller. That's one of the key messages Infogrames' CEO **Bruno Bonnell** wanted to instill in developers at the company's two-day Emerging Technology Conference, held last month at the UK's Centre for Popular Music in Sheffield.

"The PC games market is going to be below $20 [per unit] within the next two years and we should think about it because if we are not able to increase the volumes that we are selling we are going to face problems in the development costs," he told the gathering of 250 game designers.

"We used to make games for a public which expects 15 to 50 hours of gameplay," he continued. "One of the reflections we should have today is how long as an average is our target audience going to play? Is it still 15 to 50? My guess is that it's probably closer to five to ten."

Bonnell bases his view on an Infogrames survey which indicated that 85 per cent of people who have bought titles by the publisher have never finished one (it should be remembered that Infogrames published *Outcast*). Now he wants developers to look at ways of making shorter, cheaper-to-develop games that the mass market can digest.

"One of the ways to decrease the budget is to seriously consider the target audience," he said. "People today – and I mean mass market – may not have 30 or 50 hours to spend on one game. They're interested in a 10-to-15-hour experience for $20, and buying another 10 to 15 for $20 rather than having 30 hours to spend for $40."

Despite the massmarket orientation, Bonnell spelled out clear views on future technologies to the 17 development teams at the conference. On top of Infogrames' continuing interest in consoles, future consoles and PCs, Bonnell is focusing on the potential of palmtop gaming devices and their crossover into the toys market.

"We will have more and more boys and girls playing with these toys, with screens, buttons and microprocessors," he said. "I think that's a very important segment and Infogrames will be one of the leading publishers on these platforms."



It's certainly not up there with GDC (see below), but this year's event was the highest-profile yet

Another key area on Bonnell's mind is interactive TV. With so many channels emerging he believes a games network is likely, along with the ability to download games that can be played on set-top boxes. This only spells fresh opportunities for publishers.

Elsewhere at ETC, which welcomed developers from Australia (Melbourne House), the US (GT and Infogrames), France and the UK, Microsoft was on hand to demonstrate some of the new 3D and sound capabilities in DirectX. ATI, S3, Nvidia and VideoLogic talked about their upcoming 3D technologies, while game artists were treated to seminars on *3D Studio MAX*, *Maya 2.5*, the motion-capture and animation software *Kaydara*, and **paint* and **effect* by Kinetix.

The numbers game

Infogrames is reputedly the world's second biggest publisher. Consider the following figures:

Estimated value Infogrames will attain this year: **$1bn**
Number of people working for Infogrames worldwide: **2,500**
And in development: **1,200**
Number of countries in which the company's games are distributed: **65**
Number of PlayStation SKUs to be released by Infogrames in 2000: **32**
Number of countries in which Infogrames has offices: **21**
Language versions of *Driver 2* which will be available: **eight**
N64 SKUs to be launched by Infogrames in 2000: **three**

Bonnell returns

Few chief executives in the games industry are quite as enigmatic as Infogrames' French boss Bonnell. When he turned 40 two years ago, he celebrated in rather peculiar fashion by running the New York marathon.

Since then, his company has been on an acquisitions marathon of its own, snapping up Ocean, Philips Media assets, GT Interactive and Gremlin.

UK publishers and developers who have been swallowed in the process have had misgivings, but many at the ETC seemed convinced by Bonnell's comfortable, open style.

GATES TO SHOW THE WAY IN SAN JOSE

Microsoft chairman expected to show X-Box at annual Game Developers Conference



He's smiling so broadly because he has a special little secret

As this issue went to press, some of the biggest names in the UK videogame industry were set to attend the Game Developers Conference in San Jose. On the guest list were Peter Molyneux, Jez San, Demis Hassabis, and Lara creators Toby Gard and Paul Douglas, promising to give talks on a variety of topics, ranging from AI design for multiplayer games and the benefits of micro-programmable graphics architecture to founding a start-up and working with brands.

More than 300 classes and tutorials were in place, but the highlight of the conference, which is co-sponsored by Microsoft, was set to be the opening address by chairman Bill Gates.

There has been growing speculation that Gates would choose GDC to go public on the industry's worst-kept secret, X-Box. A full report on what was and wasn't revealed will appear next month.

Sony and Nintendo are the other big GDC players. With the conference taking place just a few days after the launch of PlayStation2 in Japan, more details on Nintendo's Dolphin were expected.

PRESCREEN

EDGE PREMIERES INTERACTIVE ENTERTAINMENT'S FRESHEST FACES

"Because it's there"

Or game developers: the most fickle breed

Does it really feel like six years since the original PlayStation launched in Japan? To the more crusty members of the **Edge** team, it seems like only yesterday that the first Sony machine turned up in the office under the arm of a trusty FedEx employee.

The videogame industry is rare in that so much water can pass under so many bridges in such a relatively small amount of time. Show today's average PlayStation owner Namco's original *Ridge Racer* conversion today and you'd probably be greeted with snorts of disinterest. Extended sessions with the likes of Konami's *Metal Gear Solid* and Polyphony's *Gran Turismo* does this to a man. Unwittingly, he has become conditioned to expect his console to sing.

What's heartening is that, with PlayStation2 already on sale in Japan and X-Box and Dolphin waiting in the wings, some of the world's most innovative coders remain committed to squeezing the last droplets of juice out of Sony's first entry into the console hardware market.

This month **Edge** previews *Vanishing Point* (page 28), a driving game from Clockwork Studios which does things once thought impossible on the PlayStation. Meanwhile, with *World Touring Cars* (page 30) Codemasters is refining the racing genre with an ongoing process of tweaking and testing.

And then there are recent start-ups, such as Lost Toys, the Guildford-based codeshop whose first release, through Take Two Interactive, is set to be an 'arcade/action' title in glorious 32bit PlayStation-O-Vision.

Purists claim that visuals do not matter, that the gameplay experience stands above all else. This is, of course, utter tripe. What would you rather play – a game that entertained you but looked mediocre, or a game that played exactly the same but looked absolutely breathtaking? Exactly.

But the rush towards embracing a new wave of technology is happening before existing formats have had the opportunity to be wholly explored (as *Vanishing Point* attests). Having played a great number of first-wave PlayStation2 titles of late, **Edge** certainly cannot help but feel that some developers have made the leap to 128bit for the same reason Sir Edmund Hillary felt compelled to tackle Mount Everest.

In the worst instances, extra processing power and memory encourage laziness. And they're hardly things the videogame industry needs more of right now.





The likes of *Gran Turismo* (left) have made PlayStation users *demand* special software. Fortunately, the format's maturity means that *Vanishing Point* (centre) and *World Touring Cars* can happily oblige

Edge's most wanted

Identifying the hottest incoming blips

			
Dead Or Alive 2	**Dark Cloud**	**Maximo**	**In Cold Blood**
(DC) Tecmo	**(PS2) SCEI**	**(PS2) Capcom**	**(PS) SCEE**
Acclaim has stepped in and picked up the UK publishing rights to Tecmo's slick brawler, and a recent build shows what a wise move that is.	Taking what is arguably the richest of all genres, SCEE appears to be crafting what PlayStation owners have so far been denied – their own *Zelda*.	When **Edge** visited Capcom's Osaka HQ around three years ago, a 3D *Ghosts'n'Goblins* title was in the works for the N64. This is that title now.	Elsewhere this issue **Edge** bemoans the lacklustre scripting of so many games; here's a 32bit console title that tries to counter such grumbles.

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PRESCREEN ALPHAS

PS2 *DOA2* BEATS DC IN A GRAPHICAL BOUT WHILE SEGA USES THE FORCE TO CONSOLIDATE ITS COIN-OP PRESENCE

DEAD OR ALIVE 2

FORMAT: **PS2/DC** DEVELOPER: **TECMO**



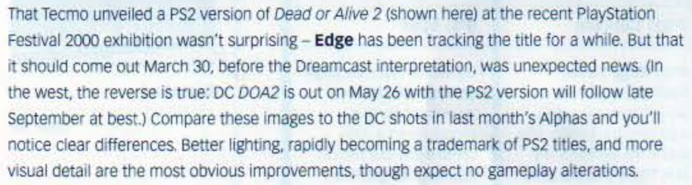












That Tecmo unveiled a PS2 version of *Dead or Alive 2* (shown here) at the recent PlayStation Festival 2000 exhibition wasn't surprising – **Edge** has been tracking the title for a while. But that it should come out March 30, before the Dreamcast interpretation, was unexpected news. (In the west, the reverse is true: DC *DOA2* is out on May 26 with the PS2 version will follow late September at best.) Compare these images to the DC shots in last month's Alphas and you'll notice clear differences. Better lighting, rapidly becoming a trademark of PS2 titles, and more visual detail are the most obvious improvements, though expect no gameplay alterations.

STAR WARS RACER

FORMAT: **COIN-OP** DEVELOPER: **SEGA R&D#5**















At Sega's request, AM#5 recently demo'd its version of the finest sequence from 'Episode 1', though it should be noted that not all the game's effects are currently implemented, hence the slight blandness of these shots. Gameplay is perfect adrenaline-rush material, with a selection of tracks harking back to the N64 version, and dual stick controls mimicking those of 'real' pod racers. Running on the Naomi-enhanced Hikari arcade board, the likelihood of a Dreamcast is not only technically improbable but impossible given that LucasArts' licence to Sega covers only the coin-op market.

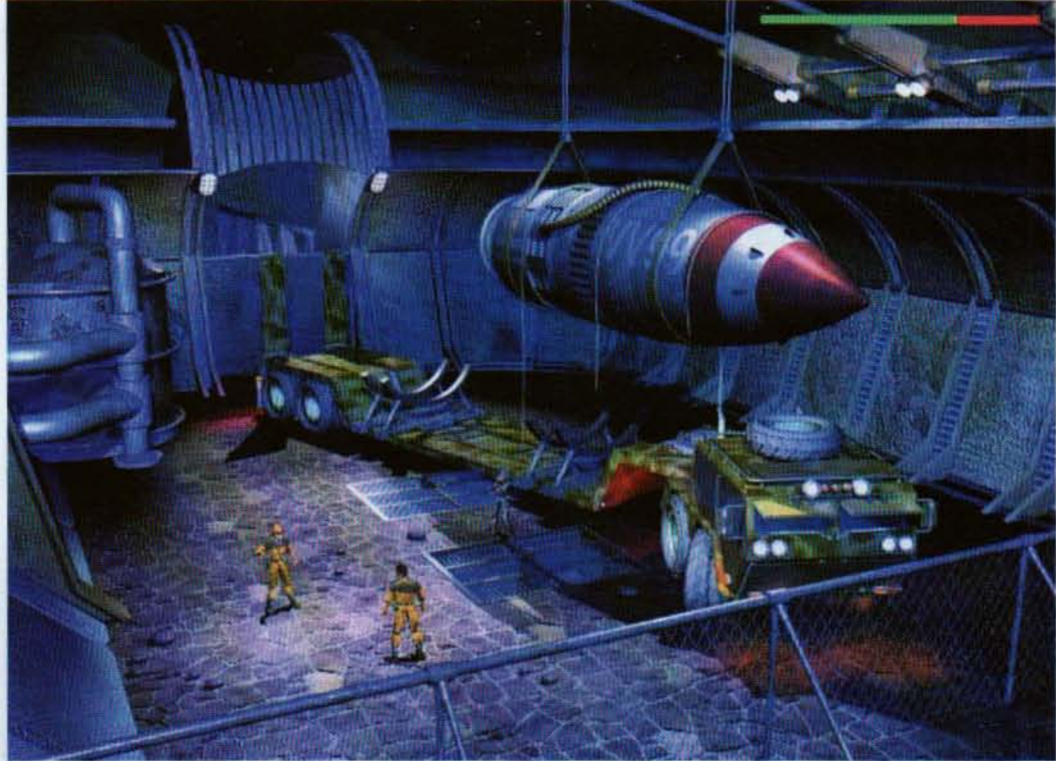
IN COLD BLOOD

FORMAT: **PS/PC** DEVELOPER: **REVOLUTION SOFTWARE**

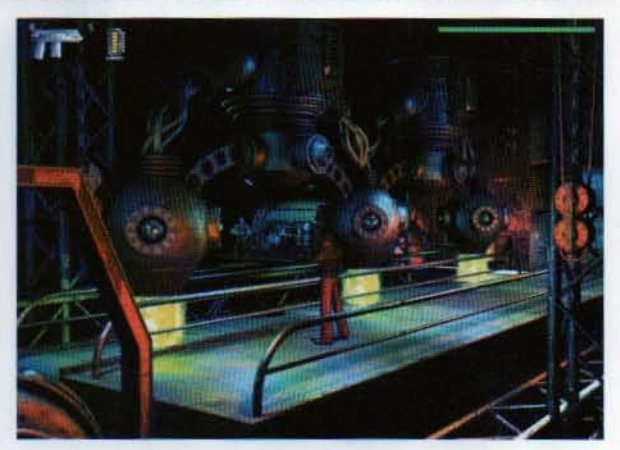


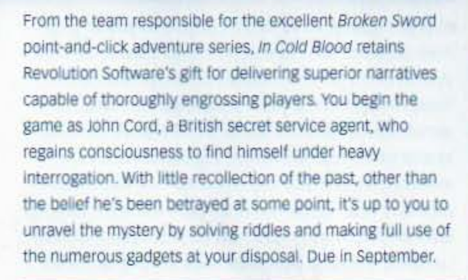










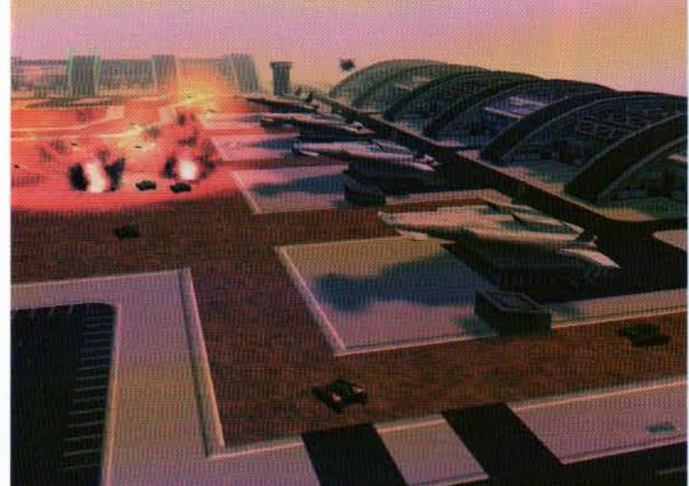


From the team responsible for the excellent *Broken Sword* point-and-click adventure series, *In Cold Blood* retains Revolution Software's gift for delivering superior narratives capable of thoroughly engrossing players. You begin the game as John Cord, a British secret service agent, who regains consciousness to find himself under heavy interrogation. With little recollection of the past, other than the belief he's been betrayed at some point, it's up to you to unravel the mystery by solving riddles and making full use of the numerous gadgets at your disposal. Due in September.

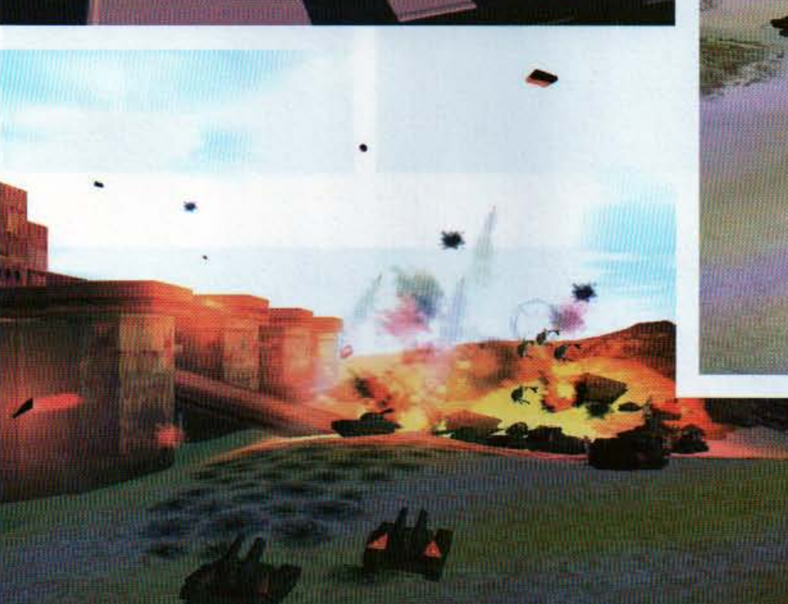


DOGS OF WAR

FORMAT: **PC/DC** DEVELOPER: **SILICON DREAMS**







Formerly *Warmonkeys* (a name **Edge** rather liked), *Dogs of War* is progressing well, with lighting effects polished even further than when it made an appearance here last July. The first AT (action tactics) game to be released for the PC (with DC version to follow), *Dogs of War* offers three distinct warring factions, 25 levels, advanced AI routines, 35 detailed unit types (with direct control over any of them), multiple perspectives (anything from satellite to a sniper's rifle sight) and line-of-sight-dependent gameplay mixing arcade immediacy with the strategic overtones usually associated with RTS titles. A PC (version shown) release is due very soon while DC owners will have to wait until later in the year.

EXCITEBIKE 64

FORMAT: **N64** DEVELOPER: **LEFT FIELD**

Having disappeared from sight for a few months now, Left Field's modernisation of the fiendishly addictive NES game has returned, looking rather better after its conspicuous absence. Bike and rider detail has been boosted, while rider tricks are now implemented. Given the rich textures, expect final code to require (or at the very least support) the N64's Expansion Pak. One of **Edge**'s favourite 64bit games at last year's E3, if it retains the playability of its 8bit predecessor – particularly in fourplayer mode – this could be something worth blowing the dust off your N64 for – although it could yet face tough competition from the imminent US release of *Jeremy McGrath Supercross 2000*.











SAMBA DE AMIGO

FORMAT: **DC** DEVELOPER: **SEGA**











Yes, Sega's maracas-shaking extravaganza is coming to Dreamcast. Given the original's Naomi-powered architecture (and judging by these images), the conversion will be another flawless endeavour for the company's internal teams. In Japan, where many arcade-goers have embraced the coin-op, literally getting into the swing of things by shaking their hips along with the samba tempo while matching the onscreen prompts with their maracas, this conversion is destined for greatness. In the UK, which has only just seen the official release of Konami's BeMani series, success is not assured. A custom controller will help its chances.

RIDGE RACER 64

FORMAT: **N64** DEVELOPER: **NAMCO**












Out in the US by the time you read this, **Edge** figures any N64 owner thinking of purchasing Namco's 64bit version of its racing franchise might want to know how the title fares when put against its PlayStation equivalent. The answer is: rather well. Textures are clean, detail is fine (including the brakelight blur effects seen in *R4*), and everything moves at an impressive rate. Control is analogue or digital (the latter proving preferable, oddly), and the multiplayer option offers significant longevity.

INT'L TRACK & FIELD 2000

Shown here in N64 form (though expected in the summer for seemingly every format, including PS2), Konami's button-bashing experience will no doubt ride the inevitable hype wave surrounding this year's Olympics. In total, 14 competitions mixing events from the series' previous two PlayStation incarnations as well as three new ones such as horizontal bar have made the cart (though triple jump, breaststroke, trap shooting and vault need unlocking). A fourplayer mode is obviously supported, as is the format's Expansion Pak, allowing the developer to include some detailed visuals (motion blur is used for replays, for instance). Here's hoping the original gameplay remains intact.

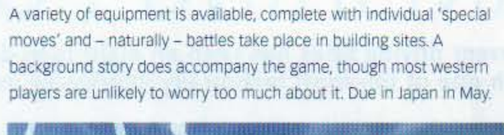




BUCHIGIRE KONGOU

FORMAT: **PS2** DEVELOPER: **ARTDINK**

Presumably having come to the conclusion that there are no objects left for polygonal fighters to throw at each other in beat 'em ups, Artdink has decided to move up a step and has the protagonists in its next PS2 title facing off against each other in bulldozing machinery.



A variety of equipment is available, complete with individual 'special moves' and – naturally – battles take place in building sites. A background story does accompany the game, though most western players are unlikely to worry too much about it. Due in Japan in May.



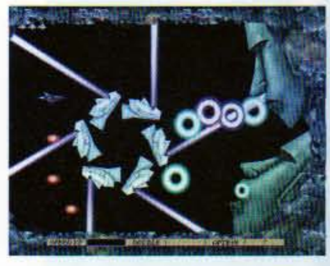






GRADIUS III & IV

FORMAT: **PS2** DEVELOPER: **KONAMI**









Just as Konami supported the original PlayStation's launch with a conversion of *Parodius*, so it comes to pass that the developer gives the 128bit successor a slice of 2D shoot 'em up action. Parts three and four of the legendary series are to be included on one CD-ROM, the former being the more widely known (at least in the west) of the two. Both episodes showcase gorgeous bitmapped imagery, and although Sony's new unit wasn't engineered with mass-scale sprite shifting in mind, the action here should be as silky smooth as can be imagined.

VANISHING POINT

A rabid dissatisfaction with current driving titles has seen an eight-man development team emerge with one of the most technically impressive interpretations of PlayStation racing to date









There is no weather in *Vanishing Point*, though night races do occur. The developer says it is unsatisfied with the PlayStation's recreation of climate





As you can probably tell, the vehicles are licensed, so expect them to incur internal damage only

Clockwork Games, whose portfolio includes 1997's Psygnosis-published *Speedster*, has spent the last 18 months in deepest development country. It is now resurfacing, armed with a project near completion. To compete with the *Gran Turismos* and *Ridge Racers* of this world requires something rather special. Clockwork knows that to achieve this standard calls for a heftier dose of work than the average publishing deal timescale allows. Until recently (presumably until Acclaim stepped in), the venture has been a self-funded exercise.

Casual observers would view this as something of a gamble. Clockwork surely never saw it that way. Instead, it contracted a three-man team from one of the country's leading vehicle physics research centres to come up with the data for the ingame car dynamics. The result is a selection of the most accurately modelled four-wheeled machines to have made it to polygonal status. Cars behave impressively like the real thing.

Clockwork contracted a team from **one of the country's leading vehicle physics research centres** to provide realistic data for the car dynamics

Unlike other games, everything is calculated in 3D, so should you get your trajectory seriously wrong, don't be surprised to see your car scraping along the track on its roof. Getting experts in to deal with the handling freed the crew to focus on what it understood best, namely AI and technology. While a love of Sega coin-op racers (*Sega Rally* on the Saturn remains the team's favourite) is certainly responsible for *Vanishing Point*'s colourful, arcade-like visual quality, the determination to at least match the competition in terms of technical aptitude has resulted in *Vanishing Point* being one of the most stunning racing titles available on PlayStation. Look as hard as

Format: **PlayStation**

Publisher: **Acclaim**

Developer: **Clockwork Games**

Release: **May**

Origin: **UK**







Vanishing Point is an exciting marriage of arcade-inspired visuals and authentic handling dynamics. Everything appears impressively considered



As 80 cars are continuously going around the circuits in the same direction, rolling starts *à la Daytona* have had to be implemented

you might and you will see no evidence of pop-up. The game exudes a feel of environmental solidity which is rarely attributed to 32bit titles. Clockwork prides itself on being able to draw and maintain scenery as far as the eye can see – hence the game's title. Obviously tracks are designed so that infinite distances never occur, but you'd be surprised at just how far some of the straights stretch.

And all the while a constant 30fps is maintained, even in twoplayer mode. Eight cars are always simultaneously onscreen promoting close racing. And on any one of the eight varied circuits a total of 80 cars are constantly moving around. Half of these comprise civilian traffic, while the other 40 (of which your car is one) race each other. And the adaptive AI on each of these sports (whereby a car continuously monitors its surroundings and situation, making decisions accordingly), gives the impression of a human-controlled vehicle.

Then there are all the other modes, plus the main oneplayer championship. For instance, the stunt option introduces you to the way the cars handle by putting you through a series of increasingly difficult acrobatic tasks. A *Sega Rally*-style mode removes the civilian traffic as you make your way up the leaderboard over a series of races, while twoplayer games have their own specifically designed circuits which ensure there is tight competition. Of course, there's also a tuning shop. There's a lot more to *Vanishing Point* than is initially apparent, in fact. The developer has thought long and hard about what it hopes to achieve and the result could prove to be worth that hard work. **Edge** looks forward to finding out.





Originally developed for PS and PC, the latter format has now been dropped, though other current formats have a chance. *VP*'s the start of bigger things





Having already finished a lot of the hard work (as far as dynamics are concerned), Clockwork is excited at the possibilities offered by next-generation hardware such as PS2

WORLD TOURING CARS

Having made the distinctive sector its own, Codemasters is preparing to drive saloon-car racing into remodelled, retuned and reupholstered territory



Take too many hard knocks and you can write-off your race. This does, of course, allow scope for players to launch series of dirty tricks campaigns







One of the most impressive touches is provided by seeing your bonnet going sailing overhead, which tends to happen when you least expect it

With Dreamcast establishing itself as a sound development platform and the release of PlayStation2 in Japan, despite innovations with the likes of *Vanishing Point* (see p28), the grey PS1 dinosaur may also prove a feeding ground for tweak programming. Enter *WTC World Touring Cars*, the third instalment of Codemasters' 2.5m-selling *Touring Cars* series. Early code indicates that this title will be a slick and polished product, showing all the fine hallmarks of its creator.

Perhaps in response to criticism that *TOCA 2* appeared at a first glance too similar to its forebear, an overhaul is in place. *WTC* stridently boasts a momentum prediction engine, authentic detailing of 23 tracks from across the globe, 40 real cars, individual driver personalities, dynamic polygon deformation techniques, and all-new career game and tournament modes. But amid the fanfare, *WTC* still fundamentally looks and feels very much like its two previous iterations. Series fans will no doubt lap up the extra features, while those coming to the PlayStation late could do worse than purchasing a Codemasters driving game.

In *WTC*'s defence, the polygon deformation damage system is looking impressive, with crumpling bodywork occurring gradually as the race knocks mount up rather than all at once with a single blow. It contains the expected quota of bonnets being torn off and bumpers hanging loose, although **Edge** hopes that sparks will eventually fly from trailing metalwork to add a touch of panache to

Car performance is altered to your detriment after serious damage. This should favour skilled, bullish driving over bulldozing and random racing

Format: **PlayStation**

Publisher: **Codemasters**

Developer: **In-house**

Release: **Summer**

Origin: **UK**

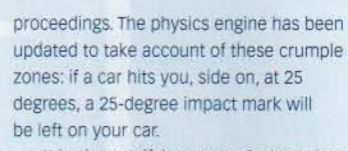






If ever a game has promoted the virtues of taking part (and trashing other vehicles), rather than simply vying to come first, *World Touring Cars* is it

There are numerous moments of visual brilliance, yet the absence of sparks emanating from trailing bumpers seems to be an odd oversight







The now-obligatory option screens are produced with the usual professionalism of Codemasters' titles

proceedings. The physics engine has been updated to take account of these crumple zones: if a car hits you, side on, at 25 degrees, a 25-degree impact mark will be left on your car.

It is also gratifying to see Codemasters welcoming careful drivers, by significantly altering car performance to your detriment after serious damage is sustained. This will ensure that bulldozing techniques and random driving is not encouraged, which should make way for skilled yet bullish driving to win the day. Of course, the satisfaction of taking out one of your rivals while using him to hold your own speed around a tight corner remains a thrill to be savoured.

The game structure has been given attention and now provides either a longterm challenge or a quick fix. Though not available in the code **Edge** has viewed, players should be able to take a given driver through an entire career, starting with national championships and going through to international level, then finally challenging for top dog status on the world stage.

A special Tournament mode is also promised, which will allow players to custom build their own mini championship by selecting preferred tracks and cars to race against. Just how much this adds to genuine gameplay and longevity remains to be seen.

Codemasters has also attended to some of the previous instalments' pop-up problems, resulting in a much smoother-looking ride, and all the tracks sport more roadside scenery than before – most of which can be satisfyingly destroyed with a brief detour from the grey stuff. The cars are particularly well modelled and with 40 to choose from, including the Audi TT, Toyota Celica and Bentley Hunaudieres, there is much to stimulate in visual terms.

As *GT2* has recently proved, more options, more cars and more tracks are enough to shift units by the lorryload, and *WTC* seems certain to follow in its burn marks.







Draw distance is impressive and the action whips along smoothly. Admire the scenery too much, though, and you may find elements of it ending up scattered across your bonnet

CARMAGEDDON TDR 2000

More and more developers are looking to the movies for inspiration, and SCi's latest blatantly tips its hat to some of cinema's most celebrated celluloid actioners







The selection of vehicles on offer is gratifyingly vast, and includes such delights as off-roaders (above) and an oddly styled, three-wheeled jet bike



Missions in the game throw up a number of challenges. In the 'Hollowood' stage, one task involves bringing 'King Konk' to life

Format: **PC**

Publisher: **SCi**

Developer: **Torus**

Release: **TBA**

Origin: **Australia**

Since **Edge** last viewed SCi's most ambitious driving title to date (see **E**82), things have significantly moved on.

Torus, the Australian codeshop behind the game (having replaced original series codeshop Stainless), has tweaked *Carmageddon TDR 2000*'s physics engine considerably, resulting in an experience which, while delivering some clearly tongue-in-cheek gameplay values, offers up the kind of considerations you might not expect from such an outrageously conceived title.

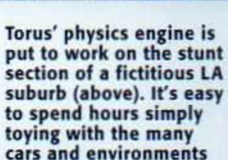
The entire experience has more than a hint of John Carpenter's 'Escape From New York' about it. Whether it's the grim, dilapidated downtown areas of early sections or the broken bridge level that proves such a consequential element in the game's storyline as it reaches its conclusion, *TDR* blatantly cribs from the director's ageing vision of a bleak future.

Settings aside, this is, like its predecessors, very much a go anywhere, do anything game. "The original *Carmageddon* was designed to be a complete piss-take from day one," says **David Ratcliffe**, SCi's development director. "It was everything that all the fancy-paint-job-on-tracks racing games didn't do. But in the light of all the controversy the other unique features of the game – the open, 'realistic' 3D landscapes and the physics system – just get forgotten."

This time around, environments have been pushed to a new level. Sprawling in scope thanks to Torus' hugely capable custom 3D engine, each setting offers a bewildering number of individual elements, from a Thunderdome-style construction in a blatantly 'Mad Max III'-inspired desert level, to the aforementioned bridge section, which does an extraordinary job in






Torus' physics engine is put to work on the stunt section of a fictitious LA suburb (above). It's easy to spend hours simply toying with the many cars and environments





building an elaborate structure littered with burned-out vehicles and a raft of other hazards that must be negotiated with the kind of precise care rarely called for in a driving game.

Comparisons with Activision's *Interstate '82* can easily be made, but SCI's game is the more complex and potentially gratifying of the two. If *TDR* stalls when compared to its nearest rival, it's in its general tone: the game's plot and themes may be dark, but the dayglo nature of some visual elements conspire to erode an otherwise convincing fantasy of a corrupted civilisation. As Ratcliff suggests, the *Carmageddon* brand has always been about taking the mick and flying in the face of accepted wisdom, but with gamers clearly turned on to the realistic grime of *Driver* and *Midtown Madness*, it would be interesting to see what Torus could achieve with a more gritty, hard-bitten visual approach.

Rarely has a driving game cast its **net so wide, to deliver believable physics, enthralling environments** and a disregard for moral convention

The build **Edge** recently played featured exaggerated dynamics and a framerate that still requires optimisation, but *TDR* promises to be a fascinating title. Rarely has a driving game cast its net so wide, attempting to deliver believable physics, enthralling environments, and a refreshing disregard for moral convention.






The map (above) will only indicate the areas you've already explored. A house call (left)

DEUS EX

A new engine brings a hugely ambitious 'reality RPG' loaded with complex and unpredictable world simulations, from the studio where 'design is law'









Knives and projectile weapons are as popular as guns in the game. You can even throw everyday objects such as plant pots at your opponents

"I didn't want to make another game where I walked into a dungeon to save a princess or came from space to save a planet," says Ion's Spector

Format: **PC**

Publisher: **Eidos**

Developer: **Ion Storm**

Release: **Spring**

Origin: **US**

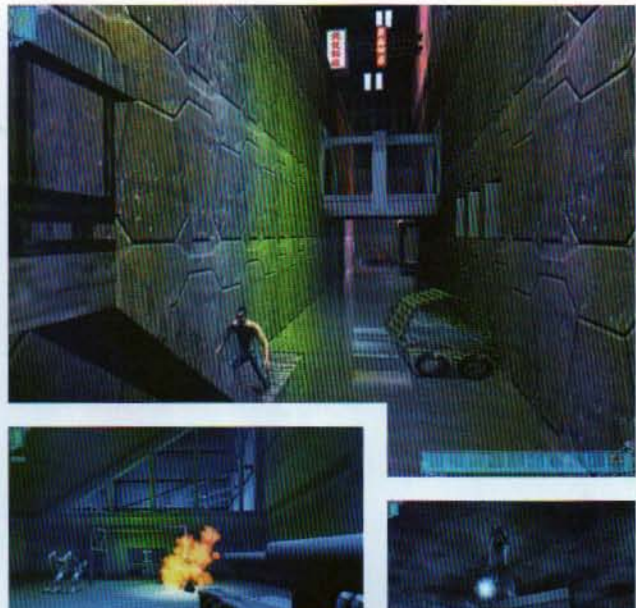
Think of the most ambitious RPG you've ever played. Factor in another dimension with the *Unreal Tournament* engine. Add, in equal parts, *Half-life*, *Thief* and concentrated LucasArts, then subtract anything that looks like a *Final Fantasy* statistic or an elf. You're left with the supercharged *Deus Ex*. "We wanted to put power back into the player's hands," says producer **Warren Spector**, of Ion Storm. "In *Half-life*, you have to kill everything you see. In *Thief*, when you're not sneaking you're not playing the game, by design. Our idea is that if you want to play *Deus Ex* as a straightforward shooter, you can. If you want to play it thoughtfully or in both ways, you can, too."

Overshadowed by stablemate *Daikatana*, *Deus Ex* comes as a pleasant surprise. There's little to compare it with, except perhaps the *System Shock* series from Spector's former colleagues at Origin. Yet it's not really the bold prerelease promises of *Deus Ex* that are new – it's seeing them this close to fulfilment. The story, with its 150,000 lines of lip-synched dialogue, is set in Earth's near future. The rich are richer, the poor are poorer and stricken by a rampant virus called the grey death. It's a world of nanotechnology, cyborgs, terrorism and conspiracy theories. Think of an 'X-Files' episode written by William Gibson.

"The story provides context," says Spector. "We want players thinking about why they're doing things." First, you must decide what kind of player you want to be. You can distribute your skills to create a fighter, a computer hacker, a stealthy covert operative or some Quixotic mix. Experience points let you upgrade your skills through four distinct levels (untrained, trained, skilled and master). Anyone can do anything with the right tools – be it ammunition, lock picks or ice-breaking software. Where a one-finger-typing



Size and unpredictability are sheer. Snipe with a silenced pistol from the top of a building and you risk discovery by guards, alerted by the falling shells



***Deus Ex* relies heavily on the *Unreal Tournament* engine, making it an attractive game; customisation has focused more on AI and physics**

mercenary would take an age to gain entry to a computer system and might only have a second or two inside, a hacker could be inside in moments, perusing around. Nothing is left to luck. Players make informed choices.

"We'll never give you enough skill points to master everything," warns Spector. "We're trying to drive player differentiation. All game problems can be solved in more than one way. If you say you want to develop weapon skills, you are likely to get through the game lugging around lots of weapons and creating carnage. If you want to develop your computer skills, you are going to look for computers and ATMs and probably avoid combat." Even the player's body is customisable. More importantly, power-ups scattered throughout the game enable microscopic biomechanical upgrades which enable you to see in the dark, breathe underwater or run faster. Take one particular nano-path and others close up.

All this variation makes Ion Storm's task a nightmare. Designing decent *Half-life* or *Thief*-style levels is hard. Imagine trying to design generic challenges that could work in both games. The solution arrives in complex real world simulations with robots, guards, computerised security systems and innocent people, set in motion with decent AI. Not an easy proposition to read, let alone code. Spector showed **Edge** everything, from guard systems that could be reprogrammed by hackers to shoot their own side, to swinging meat in a Hong Kong butchers indicating which direction a fleeing enemy is headed. *Deus Ex* has unpredictable 'real world' AI and the game is absolutely huge. Spector rates the story's importance ahead of the technology. The engine is finished and Ion Storm still has a couple of months to tweak the gameplay.

You decide what kind of player you want **to be. You can create a fighter, a computer hacker, stealthy covert operative** or some Quixotic mix

Deus Ex is the sort of game that **Edge** calls for. A multiplayer *Deus Ex* is, surely, the desirable next thing; a teamplay version seems a sure-fire hit, but there are no firm plans. "Don't even start me on multiplayer," Spector gasps. And when you remember the protracted birth of Jon Romero's *Daikatana* over the corridor, you realise he's probably wise not to.



Unlike some of Spector's work in the *Ultima* games, dialogue is to the point



If big brother isn't watching you, the AI certainly is (above). You can even tweak your character's features to match your own (top)

PROJECT IGI

Half-Life has reigned supreme for too long. Developer Innerloop has its sights set on pushing the tension factor of the FPS genre beyond anything that has gone before





Jones is a hard-bitten SAS veteran working for the British government. His destinations include Africa, The Rockies and the icy wastes of Murmansk



Innerloop has tested various weapons and the effects they have on different kinds of material. Hiding behind boxes is no longer an option





At key moments the player will take control of a helicopter gunship. Dogfights with other helicopters have been promised

Format: **PC**

Publisher: **Eidos Interactive**

Developer: **Innerloop**

Release: **Summer**

Origin: **Norway**

Oslo-based developer Innerloop seeks to take the FPS military genre to new levels with its forthcoming title. Producer and game designer **Andrew Wensley** has even taken the drastic measure of taking his coding team out to test various weapons which will be used in the game. "We went to a place in Finland just 16 miles away from the Russian border, with some ex-SAS military advisers," he reveals. "I feel it's important that we have a real sense of how these guns feel and react in the human hand."

Project IGI prides itself on the concept of playable realism. A balance must be maintained, maintains Wensley, between just how much the player can interact and be affected by his surroundings. Too much realism and the game becomes over complicated and fussy; too little and true immersion is lost.

The game is now 14 months into its development and with only a relatively small team of 13 staff is already beginning to look impressive. Playing in an area of 10,000,000 square kilometres, *Project IGI* boasts scenery which can be traversed in real time. There will be 15 complex missions, taking place in various locations. Some demand that the hero, ex-SAS veteran Jones, covertly negotiates his way across vast exteriors, while others take place in elaborate, sometimes claustrophobic interiors.

"Tension is everything," says Wensley. "We want the player to be really frightened when all hell breaks loose." Part of this tension will be built up from the accuracy of the sound effects – glass shatters, while bullets crack and ricochet (intriguingly, the game tracks diverted bullets, which can still cause damage).

As in *Hidden & Dangerous,* the player will not be able to tolerate much injury, so subterfuge, intelligence and vigilance are vital. Indeed, Innerloop states that *Project IGI* is more of a "firstperson thinker shooter" than an all-out blaster. Objectives can either be completed the hard way or the easy way – it's up to the player to choose his favoured style of play. As for the meaning of the title? Innerloop isn't yet telling.





With its realistic bent, *Project IGI* demands a stealthy approach



Reiselied

Unusual name, unusual game. This is an RPG in the classic Japanese mould, but with a distinctive musical twist. Konami's obsession with audio-driven gameplay is about to enter a new dimension

Format: **PlayStation2**
Publisher: **Konami**
Developer: **In-house (KCEJE)**
Release: **July (Japan)**
Origin: **Japan**

Fledgling developer KCEJ East's RPG *Reiselied* is shaping up to go against the likes of *Final Fantasy IX* this summer. But project director **Atsushi Horigami** remains upbeat about the chances of mixing it with Square's all-conquering RPG behemoth. With two games to his credit, including the disappointing *Dance Dance Dance* which performed poorly even in his native territory, Horigami-san is eager to make his mark by exploiting the capabilities of PS2.

When *Reiselied* began life on Sony's original machine, speculation was rife about the company's next console and the 128bit hardware being engineered by Sega. KCEJ East hedged its bets and continued work on the game structure and narrative elements of the title until development kits for each next-generation machine became available, opting to continue along the Sony route.



***Reiselied* was once believed to be a Dreamcast project. As is evident from these screenshots, a conversion to Sega's unit would not be an unfeasible undertaking**

Edge: What does the title mean?

Horigami: The word is German. It has no special meaning. We selected this word to give the game a particularly European flavour. In Japan, we have few preconceived ideas about European tastes. We exploited certain aspects to appeal both to a Japanese and a European audience.

Edge: How does the storyline work?

Horigami: The hero of the game is an artist asked by the king of a peaceful island to compose a song for his daughter's wedding. When he meets the princess he realises she is unhappy. Very quickly he begins to sense that something sinister is afoot. His only thought is to finish the song and leave the island. Events later on will eventually push him to discover what is going on.

Edge: So what is the main concept behind the game?

Horigami: I can't reveal the main game system yet. The player will have to discover much by himself through exploration and initiative. Although I can reveal that it will be quite a surprise. Only time will tell if the system is understood and fully appreciated.

Edge: How does the game compare to other RPGs in terms of what it's doing?

Horigami: You will be able to move freely around the map, as in *Final Fantasy X* and *Zelda*. I have kept the island down to a manageable size and I feel the scale is perfect for this game – too big and the player will be lost. Time passes in real time with a scale of one day in the game for one hour spent playing. The weather for a whole day is simulated and the monsters will vary depending on the time of day. Different major and minor events happen at several locations in the *Reiselied* world at the same time. In this sense, no player will encounter the same events and he will be able to build his own story according to decisions. Only the start and ending are the same.

Edge: How does *Reiselied's* combat system operate?

Horigami: The hero will face big monsters like a ten-metre-tall dragon, and very small creatures like mice. Battle formations will be flexible. Either the party will surround the enemy or the enemy will surround the party. That will make a great difference. If you are in the middle of the battlefield there will be few opportunities to escape and the monsters will attack from every direction. However, if your party is placed around the enemy it has a better chance of success or will escape easily.

A third combination is also possible: the classic face-off. According to the situation, the player can use a specific kind of magic power, one which aims at a whole area or a precise location. These combinations are determined mostly randomly. The game takes into consideration a few parameters such as the nature of the location and the character's level. As in *Zelda*, it is not possible to look around, simply because *Reiselied* is not an action RPG. We felt there was no need for such an option. The item and magic system includes standard features you could find in many RPGs. There are elemental forces – fire, water, earth,





***Reiselied* uses the analogue capability of PS2's Dual Shock 2 controller, yet it makes no use of the joypad's button sensitivity. Just how popular will this function prove to be?**



Will *Reiselied* be able to tap into players' emotions? Much will depend upon the power of its narrative rather than high polygon counts or glitzy effects

Photography: Hiroki Izumi

At least ten commandable characters are promised, offering a mix of abilities







Horigami-san wants players to access his world for a second or third time. Events encountered will differ substantially in each game because of *Reiselied*'s use of time

Though battles are to be made more complicated with the introduction of party formations, the inclusion of elemental magic is hardly inspirational

light, ice, and magic powers are based on one of them. The monsters have this too, so depending on the combination of elements a magic power may be very destructive or next to no use at all. We kept it very simple so that a wide range of users may enjoy the game quickly – the look of the battle system may be familiar. It features a menu similar to the Start menu in *MS Windows*.

Edge: How many characters will make up the party? Can you talk about some of them?

Horigami: The party will include a minimum of three people including the main hero. It will be possible to build from this, since around ten more characters will join later. The hero is a musician and he has a special guitar which is alive. It will guide or advise him during the game. Incidentally, *Reiselied* is compatible with the *Guitar Freaks* controller!

And there will be a few music puzzles to solve. For example, at a certain moment, the king of the island will ask the hero to create a song for him and the player will have to perform. The king will then judge according to his playing. A few extra mini-games will also be included and *Beatmania* or *Guitar Freaks* fans will enjoy them – especially after receiving hidden items.

Edge: Why did you decide to switch the project from Dreamcast to PS2?

Horigami: In fact this isn't really true, since we did not announce the game on Dreamcast. It was a mistake reported in a magazine. At that early time we had not yet decided upon a platform. The people in charge of that magazine thought it was a Dreamcast product after seeing initial screenshots. By the time I called the person concerned it was too late. Now everybody thinks we switched from Dreamcast to PlayStation2 at the last minute.

Edge: Do you think it's risky releasing an RPG on a completely new format? Some might be concerned about the lack of an audience.

Horigami: As you know, Japanese gamers like RPGs. Out of all the PlayStation users in Japan, at least ten to 20 per cent will buy an RPG even if it is an average one – by that I mean not a *Final Fantasy* or *Dragon Quest*. So there is a market. On new hardware, it could be 30 per cent because of the launch. Of course, the percentage may drop after. The core users will buy, so it does make sense.

Edge: Is the game compatible with the PocketStation unit?

Horigami: No, I have no plans for the PocketStation. I see no use for this extension with *Reiselied*. Maybe we'll use it for another later product, though.

Edge: How about the new Dual Shock 2 controller?

Horigami: I'm afraid not. In fact, I do not see how a game can exploit these analogic buttons. How can a player control his pressure on such a small button? I don't see how. So in the case of *Reiselied*, they will be used as classic digital buttons as on PlayStation1. It could have been fun, though, with a different button shape.

Edge: Is the game specific to PS2? And what does it do that might make

Out of all the PlayStation users in Japan, at least ten to 20 per cent will buy an RPG even if it is an average one – by that I mean not a *Final Fantasy* or *Dragon Quest*

those investing in PS2 think they've made the right choice?

Horigami: You may think it strange, but the game remains in the classic mould of traditional RPGs. *Reiselied* is not displaying anything you may have seen in SCEI's or Square's demos. Now, with PS2, many companies are focused on realism in their environments or characters. Designers may have a formidable power to realise their most ambitious dreams yet. But I'm not sure that users would enjoy this for too long.

Graphics can be made to look spectacular, but what about gameplay? I mean, is it useful to design every aspect of a human face? In *Reiselied* we just use a texture applied on a polygon face where only the nose appears clearly. People often tell me that *Reiselied* features figurines in motion. I think this is cool. I don't want my game to look too realistic.

Edge: Why PS2? Are there any features impossible on other systems?

Horigami: The main point is certainly the number of polygons. You can see in *Reiselied* that we are able to display many houses and characters on the same screen. Everything is moving in real time. Until now, it was unthinkable to put ten polygonal characters on the same screen.

SCEI has displayed some beautiful demos, but I think that the main issue remains the polygon number for the moment. Each character includes 2,000 to 3,000 polygons. No other system is capable of this performance. Well, Dreamcast could approach this level but PS2 definitely has the edge. To give you an example, imagine taking the fighters from *Tekken 3* and using them as characters in an RPG.

Edge: Do you plan to use the DTS or AC-3 capabilities of the PS2?

Horigami: Since we are using streaming music, it is impossible. It is quite dangerous in such a game because problems can occur with such techniques. It is a choice we made for the requirements of the game. It was the only way to keep good sound.







In a unique twist, *Reiselied* requires you to play music at key points in the game. Using the *Guitar Freaks* controller enhances the experience

Edge: Have you encountered any difficulties developing on PS2?

Horigami: So many! The most difficult point is that people are thinking now that the level of quality seen in PS2 demos – like *The Bouncer* – is now standard. Game makers are not thinking this way. Very few companies are capable of such technical demonstrations. Few can include these exploits in a playable way. But in the near future we may have no choice other than trying to approach this level. If you consider *The Bouncer*, it looks very ambitious, but Square hasn't yet shown a playable version.

Edge: Which aspects of development did Sony's new console make easier?

Horigami: Before PS2 we had to fight with the limits of the hardware and sacrifice many features. Now it is so easy, since we can expect to do many things without thinking about limits. However, with no limits, we may need to create some of our own, in order to control the game development time. We would always be tempted to add new features, new effects, more polygons.

Edge: Which aspect of the game are you happiest with?

Horigami: I think I have developed a game system which could last quite a long time. There is always a new element to discover. As in *Pokémon*, you can continue to collect monsters even if the quest is finished.

Edge: Many PS2 developers are opting for CD-ROM instead of DVD-ROM. What are you planning to use?

Horigami: DVD-ROM. Music tracks are a big consideration. We would need at least three CD-ROMs to store everything. So, even if we do not use the full capacity of the DVD, the player will have no need to change the CD during his play. That way the cost is lower.

Edge: What kind of games do you play yourself? And is there a particular game you'd like to have made?

Horigami: I have a black PlayStation and I enjoy foreign titles. I love *Tomb Raider IV*. I also play a lot of Bandai's *Silent Bomber*. Maybe because I'm working on an RPG right now I need to play action games! Otherwise, I have a special admiration for *Alone In The Dark*. When *Bio Hazard* was released in Japan, I was struck by the numerous similarities. Since Japanese people do not know *Alone In The Dark*, they can't imagine that *Bio Hazard* is a copy of a much older foreign title. I always wished I helped to develop *Syndicate Wars* on the PC. It was such a great game with a unique atmosphere. When it was released I felt I had missed a great opportunity.





Horigami-san remains secretive about specific gameplay details, although it's likely that *Reiselied* will contain many elements familiar to fans of Konami's many previous RPGs



The KCEJ East team is concentrating on making *Reiselied* look distinctive rather than flashy. Thus, its characters' faces are made up of relatively few polygons



pyro studios

Commandos sprang out of nowhere to take the games industry by surprise in 1998. But its creator looks like anything but a one-hit wonder. **Edge** journeyed to Madrid to get a taste of the company's next lavish projects

If it's true that British game development is so strong because it's always raining outside, another excuse will have to be found for Spain. The mid-February sun has already taken the temperature into the high teens when **Edge** arrives at Pyro Studios' Madrid base. And while it's **Edge**'s first decent sight of the sun in months, here some 75 developers remain crammed into dark and stuffy offices until long after nightfall. Perhaps you never want what's on your doorstep. Or, maybe, as Pyro Studios' CEO **Ignacio Pérez Dolset** argues, they reckon they have to prove themselves. "We feel we have to work 150 per cent harder than developers in the UK," he claims. "To make games in Spain is like making wine in Sweden."

It's this 'must try harder' attitude that brought *Commandos* to a grateful PC fraternity back in 1998. Pyro's million-selling World War II romp took the lazy realtime strategy genre by storm. Based around tactics rather than tank rushes, and puzzles rather than stockpiling, it also had more character in a mission than in all Westwood's *Command & Conquer* FMV. "The advantage we have in Spain is that we have everything to prove and we've got nothing to lose," says Pérez when **Edge** asks for the secret. "If you're coming from Spain, nobody expects anything from you. Your entrance fee is higher than anyone else so you take more risks."

Today, Pyro has three games in production spanning the risk spectrum. The nearest to completion, *Commandos 2*, is also nearest to a sure thing. *Praetorians*, meanwhile, is a formation-based realtime battle game with an engine to die for that takes an established genre into new directions. Finally, the ambitious *Heart of Stone* might fail to scale its high concept but could otherwise be another *Commandos*, and invigorating to the adventure genre. Why such diversity in game styles? "We make the games we would like to play," replies Pérez. "Obviously we're trying to make our games accessible, but we're not thinking about what other people are doing. I don't know what the guy in front of me wants – so let's try to see if he wants what I want."

Having already successfully founded Spain's first ISP in 1994 and built up powerhouse distributor Proein (and ▶

having sold majority stakes of both), Ignacio and his brother and partner **Javier Pérez Dolset** don't need to do this for the money. "When people tell us 'Wow, your game looks awesome, what a great job', that's what moves us," Pérez continues.

"I was involved in the game distribution business for seven years and I saw so many mistakes – people thinking of graphics, technologies, engines... but without gameplay it's nothing. You see the same mistakes and you learn. It's like people who were very poor as children and couldn't afford to eat every day. Even when they are 40 years old and have a lot of money they remember that feeling. They eat in restaurants as if it is their last meal. It's the same thing with us and gameplay."

Once more unto the brink

It was gameplay that made *Commandos 2*. With its isometric graphics and its point-and-click interface, the game was hardly technically revolutionary. But its World War II environments and its *Lemmings*-like approach to puzzles (combined with *Syndicate*-style play) offered something PC gamers hadn't even realised they were missing. For the sequel, Pyro has been careful not to over-egg the formula. And why should it? Squad-based games might be more common now – even 3D in the case of *Hidden and Dangerous* – but no title has arrived to challenge *Commandos*.

That's not to say there aren't innovations in the latest game. The first thing **Gonzo Suarez,** the game designer and project leader, shows **Edge** is that the map can now be rotated through four rotations. It's a real world out there, which raises the complexity fourfold, challenging players to think spatially about the commandos' 3D surroundings. These environments (and the humans inhabiting them) are, again, graphically in a different league to most realtime 3D camera games. They are the latest to make a convincing case for fixed viewpoints over realtime 3D when it comes to immersion through graphical fidelity.



***Commandos 2*'s res varies up to 1,024x800, although the lowest resolution of 640x480 remains the most popular at Pyro. Detail extends to showing a raised arm moving as its attacking wielder tracks a target with his pistol**

The other big change is that you can now send your commandos inside buildings, with a swish new engine rendering the interiors. You can root out enemies or establish sniper's nests, with commandos who move near internal windows bringing up external views through the game's elegant multiple windows. The commandos are also more refined. You can send them shimmying up poles or across telephone wires. Diving into streams brings up another engine, enabling you to navigate unseen through the water. Enemy soldiers are intimidating, too. They now spot dead bodies – but why this apparently vital skill only ever comes with the second version of most games is a mystery.

The infamous viewing cones of the original, which show what enemy soldiers can see, are to be upgraded. A wave distortion effect was being tested when **Edge** visited, but it's not confirmed yet. Of course, there's still no fog of war obscuring the player's vision. This is a tactics game. Players can only crack its riddles if they have complete information about their enemy. The four camera views enable the designers to create more dense playing environments. There are training levels, too. As you move the cursor the environment animates, to show you when an action can be performed by a selected commando, such as jumping out of windows.

A few good men, a woman and a dog

The commandos have been made more versatile, which should further ease player frustration. Most of them can do most things to differing extents, although for actions like the driving of specialist vehicles, you still need the right person. Commandos can also swap equipment. These tweaks should make for a more satisfying experience than losing a sapper and having to restart.

Up to three new characters join the team. Fans of the deadly Natasha will remember her from *Commandos: Beyond the Call of Duty*. There will also be a thief who can case out building interiors from outside and search for booty. There will possibly be a dog – an engaging creation, but Pyro is adamant it won't go in without good reason. The current plan is to use it for ferrying equipment between the team.

More reinforcements arrive in the allied troops occasionally placed at your disposal. Provided a commando is within range, these foot soldiers can be ordered to set up ambushes or lay down covering fire. These extras open possibilities for tactical play.

A wide range of fully operational vehicles is likely to grab centre stage. Best is a two-person tank, which if manned

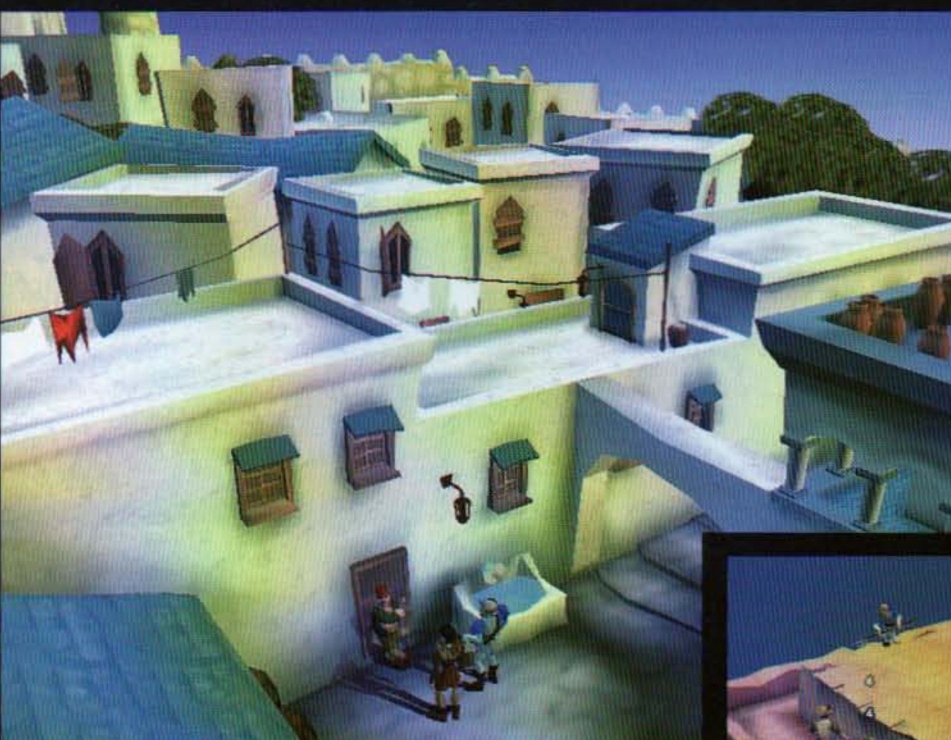


In *Commandos 2*, the mission structure remains linear, but designers claim missions will be more open in play











Visually, *Heart Of Stone*'s adventure sections, particularly while in cities, recall Infogrames' *Outcast*, although sharper. The cartoony characters are refreshing

correctly can be driven while laying waste to enemies in any direction. Obviously such devastating firepower is only available sparingly. The vehicles add colour to a huge variety of levels. Stunningly rendered, they bring to life three campaigns with trips to Europe, North Africa and the Pacific.

But there's no pretence of telling a story – the emphasis is on providing challenging missions rather than advancing the plot. Several missions are obviously favourite movie moments. Castle Colditz sets the scene for one complicated mission (the artists are collapsing under the pressure of all its windows) while 'Saving Private Ryan', 'Bridge Over The River Kwai' and 'The Great Escape' get cameos elsewhere.

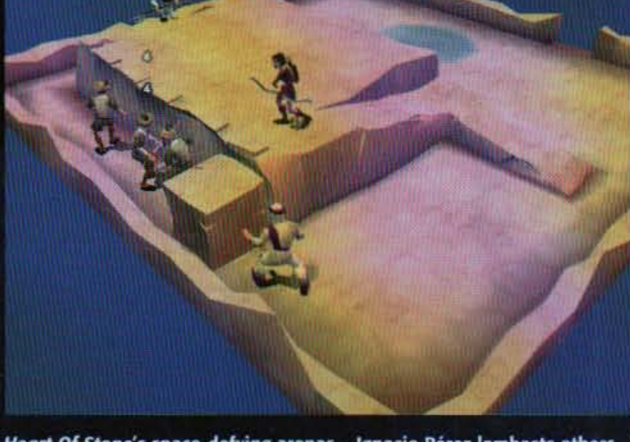
Back on the front line

If *Commandos 2* is a black-and-white war movie of 'The Guns of Navarone' school, then the game being made down the corridor, *Praetorians*, is a lavish period movie made in the early days of colour when actors were cheap and so were exotic locations. Here, huge battles take place in landscapes as diverse as the Roman civil war, Gaul and Egypt. Focusing on the *Praetorians* – elite troops of the Roman army – this is realtime war on an epic scale.

As game designers **Jaime Cifuentes** and Javier Pérez zoom about the 3D map, they point out the graphical beauty in the waterfalls and the cities. They're right to show it off. The camera will probably be computer controlled in the finished game (the designers reason that players will have enough on their plate) but in the test version it shows just what 3D was made for. And unlike other free-camera games, such as Creative Assembly's impressive *Shogun: Total War*, even the hundreds of troops are in true 3D. This also enables certain walls to be destroyed with war machines including battering rams, assault towers and catapults. These battle winners introduce an element of resource management.

Otherwise, it's a toe-to-toe strategic scrap. Like *Shogun*, *Praetorians* is based around units of troops rather than individual soldiers, and troop formation is all important. And since the aim is on creating a strategic game rather than a scrum, an effort has been made to make the game mechanics visible to the player. For instance, elevation affects the potency of your archers but there are only a couple of steps of height. It should be easier to see the tactical advantage of holding higher ground. Since all the soldiers in a unit are affected by the terrain provided it's clearly a solution that puts gameplay ahead of realism.

Praetorians' lineage obviously lies in tabletop war games. If two units of archers attack each other, the AI works out how many casualties each side should take rather than modelling the behaviour of each soldier. It then passes that information on to the graphic display driver, which ensures the requisite arrows are fired and hit targets – all appearing instantaneous to the player. As well as keeping the singleplayer game snappy, this should help multiplayer – both the warring parties' computers can do this part of the calculation locally, rather than exchanging vast quantities of information.



***Heart Of Stone*'s space-defying arenas – Ignacio Pérez lambasts others for being reality-obsessed: "We make a fictional deal with the gamer'**

It's worth noting that Pyro's development model for its classical war game is ultra-modern. The game design moved from paper to a raw maths-crunching model before the artists or even the engine programmers began their work. New ideas are tested on the flatbed before being moved into the game proper. It's a method often discussed but seldom deployed and it demonstrates another advantage of Pyro's outsider status. There's no right way of doing things. Particularly when the right way is just the old way.

And now, the secret weapon

The most intriguing game in Pyro's portfolio – and perhaps the one highest in Ignacio Perez's affections – is his own *Heart of Stone*. Still in the early days of production, it has the look of another genre-breaker. Pérez and his partner in design, César Astudillo, struggle to define it, settling on describing it as a mix of adventure and combat in a "roleplaying skin." Internally, they call it a MCAF – a multi-character adventure and fighter. Their initial idea was to make a strategic combat game, and also one where players were rewarded with more than FMV. In an adventure, after all, players enjoy the advancement of the story. Originality in how the adventure would work has also influenced the design of the game. Old-fashioned puzzles were of little interest. They wanted to create a game that relied on the skills of the game characters. Feeling a little more revolutionary, Pérez wondered what would happen if the objects in the players inventory had a life of their own. What if a key actually wanted to open the door?

The result is a world populated with a host of individuals with their own desires and wishes who players have to influence to get their way. The player's own party builds up to seven characters eventually, all with their own skills and temperaments. Non-player characters can also join the







***Praetorian*'s maps aren't particularly sprawling, although the largest might take five minutes to traverse. Instead, the focus is on tight, distinctive challenges**



***Praetorian*'s 3D engine is impressive, as these shots testify. Texture quality is excellent, and realtime shadows and lens flare are supported**

party for a time. These work like objects. To take a simple example, if you need to open a door you must locate a burglar rather than a key. Get him to join a party, bring him within range of a locked door and he'll do the rest. Or will he do something else? What if he breaks into the wrong house or tries to pickpocket the guards? What if he only stays in the party for a few minutes at a time? The stage is set for more interesting encounters than the 'find a dusty iron key' formula.

Each person brings a complex set of emotions into account. To finish one puzzle you need to find seven crewmen for a ship. The hardest to track down is described by Pérez as a *bon vivant* – a Jack the lad who's run up big debts and 'got a girl in trouble'. He refuses to join the crew until you set up a meeting with the hostile father, when he suddenly realises he's eager to leave. Except that the father mustn't see him near the ship or he'll finish him before he escapes. Nor must the debtor, who will chase the father if he kills the prospective sailor. To keep the adventure credible, it's more than an interlude to combat. You can solve certain problems without fighting at all, while other discoveries might give you an edge in battle.

Enter the arena

When you do end up fighting, the action switches to arenas that take a cue from the more recent *Final Fantasy* games. They abandon realism for scale and have little to do with the intricate and beautifully rendered world you explore. But unlike Square's games, there's a better reason than mere aesthetics. Combat is in real time and the feature-packed arenas provide tactical elements such as walls, bridges and height changes. When you discover an arena, you won't necessarily have to commit to combat immediately. But once you do, you can't withdraw until it's over. And you can only enter with three members of your party. The adventuring will sometimes help here, enabling you to get advance information on the sort of challenges you'll face and help to inform your selection. It might also open up more advantageous entrance points in the arena.

Like the rest of the game, the early combat prototype is still a crude affair, but the intentions are clear. Inspired by choreographed fight films, combat is point-and-click based and the player's units will usually be outnumbered, so planning is vital.

Each character has certain strengths. The friar can lift and hurl rocks, the black knight can block off passages, while the girl can move while shooting arrows. Actions can be combined, too, so that a character with a flaming torch can also light the girl's arrows. There are also special moves. The bulky padre can execute an earthquake punch to break off from combat, while another character can electrically charge a puddle or even himself.

Despite these flamboyant touches, Pérez stresses that the combat model is strategy rather than RPG-based, partly evidenced by the consistent damage that certain weapons cause. In true RPG fashion, team members don't die (rather they become exhausted with combat) since there's a story to be told, and the interactions of the seven adventurers are key to the unfolding plot. Originally you were going to build up a team of seven heroes. Now Pérez says you'll end up loving them because they're personable rather than because they're heroic. The friar, for instance, doesn't believe in God, the assassin is an unreliable back stabber, and the leader Michael doesn't want to lead. And, refreshingly, there's not an outrageously outsized hairdo in sight.

Produce of Spain

Pyro's three wildly different projects make it impossible to pin the studio down, either by genre or locality: "I think if a Spanish game style arises, we will fail," says Ignacio Pérez.

It sounds hackneyed, but the closest thing Pyro Studios has to a style really is having no style. Cut off from the rest of the world, the studio looks at games and developments from Japan, the UK, France and the US without the comfortable prejudices of history. One trend Pyro has certainly picked up on is the growth in team sizes. It's expanding as fast as it can, but not fast enough to fulfil the ambition of recruiting console programmers nor to grow the team sizes much above their current 30.

There's only so much local talent and, despite the tempting sun, Pérez isn't sure he can recruit from abroad just yet. "It would be like a Hollywood actor saying they're going to make films in London," he smiles. Equally, there's no doubt that the role of outsider is something of a mission statement here in Madrid. Playing the underdog (albeit one that has now earned the full might of Eidos' support) keeps the studio on its toes.

"Think of animals. It doesn't matter if you have a lion or a cat – you take an animal and you feed it, it loses its hunting instinct," Pérez explains. "It's very important to us that no one here becomes arrogant. Every day you must think you might be wrong – especially in this business. Today you think you know everything and tomorrow you realise you know nothing."



Gonzo Suarez Girard
Project leader,
Commandos 2

Jaime Cifuentes
Project leader,
Praetorians

Javier Pérez Dolset
Co-designer,
Praetorians

César Astudillo
Project leader,
Heart Of Stone

Ignacio Pérez Dolset
Co-designer,
Heart Of Stone

most w



america's wanted

These are four of the brightest young game gurus in the US. They are part of the first generation to have grown up playing games. While many merely dream, they bit the bullet, started up, and delivered *Homeworld*, *Command & Conquer*, *Drakan*, and *Spyro the Dragon*. **Edge** asks them how they did it

"The barriers to entry are a little bit higher now. But anybody with a good business plan, a good demo and the ability to go and sell a pitch to a publisher can do just what all of us did"

Ted Price, Insomniac Games

It's a cool Friday afternoon at Mars Cafe in downtown San Francisco. Several tables along, a herd of about 15 Sega game testers slowly rises from lunch to walk back to the office a block away. Just up the street, Eidos executives are locked away, studying blueprints of Lara Croft merchandise. With such an industry buzz nearby, it seems the perfect place to sit down with **Alex Garden**, CEO of Relic, the outfit behind RTS title, *Homeworld*; **Alan Patmore**, president of Surreal Software, creator of *Drakan*; **Ted Price**, president of Insomniac Games, the team responsible for the *Spyro the Dragon* franchise; and **Erik Yeo**, who designed *Command & Conquer* for Westwood, and is now design director for the recently formed Seven Studios.

Getting Started

Edge: Starting your own game development company is something you all have in common. But each of you did it differently.

Yeo: I always had a desire to succeed or fail on my own merits. We wanted to do something new. It was pretty obvious that as long as we were at Westwood the only thing we were going to be doing was *Command & Conquer*, which was a fine game, but I was ready for something else. So that was the big motivating factor.

Garden: I always knew that this was what I wanted to do, and I was given some really good advice from somebody I respect in the industry, who I won't name. Basically, they said: "When the opportunity to do your own thing comes across your desk, just take it. Don't second guess yourself. Don't worry about whether or not you can find the money. Just take the opportunity." So when it did, I was already psyched up to do it, and I just went.

Patmore: I'm constantly amazed that Surreal is still in business [laughs]. I got out of college in '93 or '94 and I didn't really have a job. I was living at Nick's [Surreal's chief operating officer] parents' house and playing *Doom* for eight to ten hours a day. Then I started building maps. I had always wanted to be in the game industry, so I asked a friend, Stan McKee, who is the CFO at Electronic Arts, how you get into the industry. He said you have to start out testing and make your way up. You know, you have to be realistic.

Garden: Classic EA.

Patmore: Yeah. And I really didn't want to do that. So I got a 'real' job at Nextel. After six months it hit me – I really didn't want to do this for the rest of my life. I could not work in the corporate environment. I was secretly playing games during work, you know, probably six hours a day. So one day I was getting Thai food with a friend, and we were all talking about what we wanted to do. I said: "I just want to start a game company." He was going, like, "Well, do it." So I said, "Oh, okay." And then he goes: "Yeah, call it Surreal Software." That was it. And the rest is history.

NAME: **Alex Garden**

AGE: **24**

COMPANY: **Relic Entertainment**

JOB TITLE: **CEO/director of *Homeworld***

RELIC SOFTOGRAPHY: ***Homeworld***



■ Relic's first title out of the gate, *Homeworld*, proved not only beautiful, but a brave step forward for the realtime strategy genre

Started playing games at the age of five. Started working in the videogame industry at the ripe age of 16 after a chance meeting with Don Mattrick (currently head of EA Studios) at a frozen yogurt shop. Worked for several Vancouver-area developers, including Radical Entertainment, as a programmer/designer before founding Relic Entertainment in May 1997. Released first title, *Homeworld*, in autumn 1999. Currently planning to continue to develop PC titles.

NAME:
Erik Yeo

AGE:
31

COMPANY:
Seven Studios

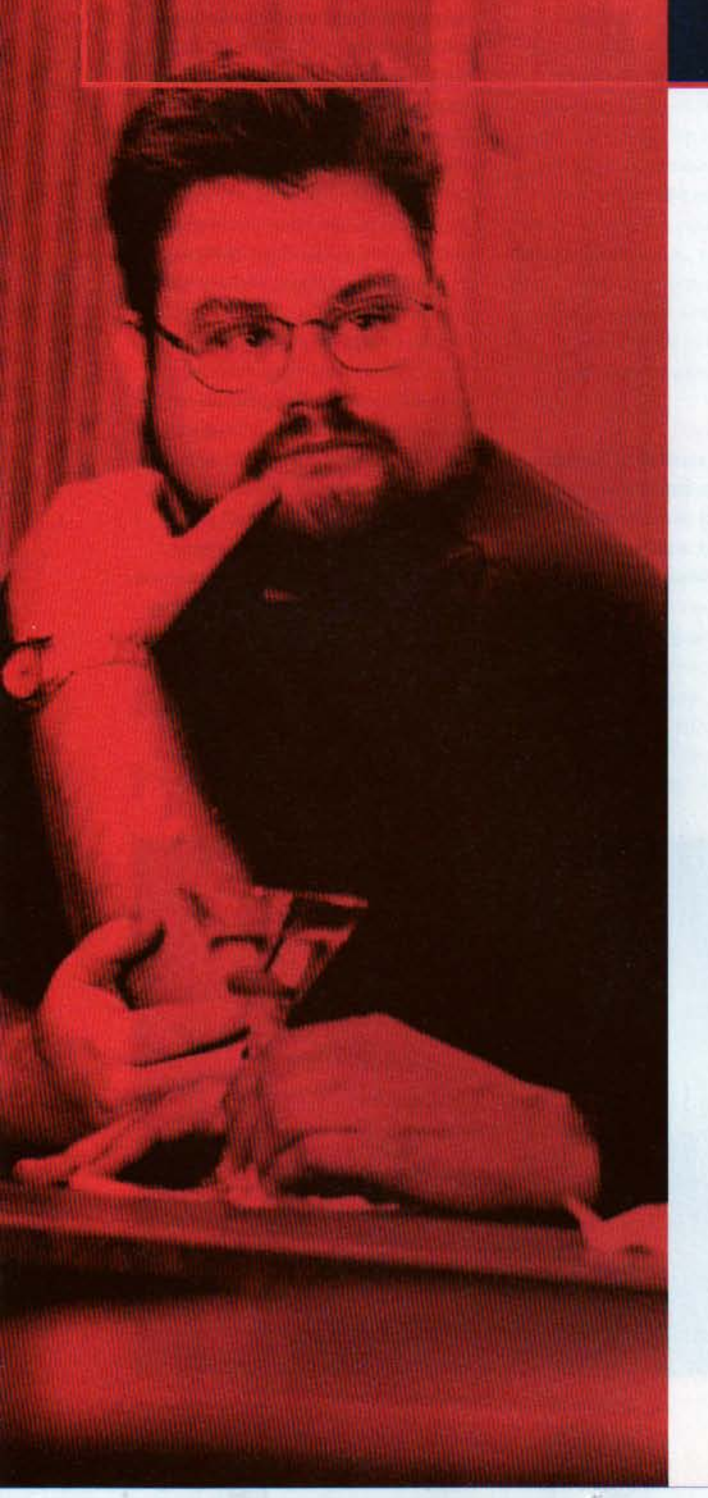
JOB TITLE:
Design director/co-founder

SEVEN STUDIOS SOFTOGRAPHY:
Work in progress on *Legion*



■ Yeo worked on his crowning achievement to date, *Command & Conquer*, after being drawn to Westwood following a 'loan' period

Began playing computer games when he was five. Took his first job in the industry ten years ago at Virgin, designing "sports titles which weren't so great." Worked at Westwood Studios "on loan" to design *The Lion King*. Joined Westwood to design one of the hottest PC properties, *Command & Conquer*. Left with Louis Peterson in early 1999 to form Seven Studios. He is now designing *Legion* for PS2, a realtime action-strategy game based on the legend of King Arthur. It's expected in 2001.



Price: I was in the medical industry and had been doing house calls, as a technician with physicians. But my real motivation was to get enough money to buy a Silicon Graphics workstation. I loved 3D modelling, and I figured games would be a good excuse to do some. And, thank God, I met Alex Hastings, who had just graduated from Princeton and was looking for a job. I'd just barely started Insomniac. He came out and we put together the demo for *Disruptor*, because we were both *Doom* fans and we wanted to do a firstperson shooter. The day our money ran out, he was sleeping on the couch of my house and everything was about to come crashing down. That was the day we signed a deal with Universal Interactive Studios. That was our first deal – for *Disruptor*.

After that, we hired Alex's brother, Brian. The three of us worked in San Diego for a year and a half before moving up to L.A. So we got very lucky, I think. When I talk to veterans I'm pretty amazed that three of us who had never done games before could actually get this far. But we've been fortunate to meet the right people and hook up with the right publishers.

Patmore: Yeah, we had a big stroke of luck after we had sort of started Surreal. Stuart Denman, who's our lead technology guy, had a Web page at the University of Washington. Ron Gilbert [founder of Cavedog Entertainment] was perusing the Web pages looking to hire programmers. He saw Stu's Web page, called him up, asking to hire him. Ron said he was thinking about starting an outside division and looking for developers. And so it was really Ron who gave us our first start. It was just total blind luck.

Yeo: We were fortunate enough to get in when we did – the only prerequisite was to know somebody on the inside.

Edge: So is it too late now for two guys in a garage to start something?

Price: It's never too late. If you're asking whether or not two guys could go and do Dreamcast or PlayStation2 development, your barrier to entry would be that dev station, which is going to cost you a lot more than a 3DO dev station costs. But it's still not astronomical.

Garden: But look at N64 emulators for the PC. You can develop for the N64 on your PC now, for free.

Price: The barriers to entry are higher now, but anybody with a good business plan, with a good demo, and the ability to go and sell a pitch to a publisher can do just what all of us did.

Patmore: The key, I think – and what a lot of small teams are missing – is the pitch to the publisher.

Edge: The core of the success of your game is how good a game you can make. But how important is it that your company has a good relationship with the publisher?

Patmore: That's what I think will make or break companies. You can have all the talent and make the best games – but if you can't deal with publishers you'll eventually go out of business. It's only a matter of time.

Garden: Unfortunately, it's easy to misinterpret that as keeping your publisher happy, which isn't the case at all. Dealing with publishers is understanding the developer/publisher relationship and being able to make it work in your favour. At the end of the day, your publisher is in a business, just like you, and its mandate is to maximise profits.

If a publisher needs to do that at the

"The previous generation – Peter Molyneux, Shigeru Miyamoto, and Sid Meier – they were the pioneers. We're the children of the industry. It's more a part of who we are than a vision of what we want"

Alex Garden, Relic Entertainment



expense of your company, it will. That doesn't make publishers bad. It just means they're being good business people. But as a developer, no one wants you to know that.

This is never explained to you and you're not encouraged to pursue that train of thought. Sometimes you risk pissing off your publisher by doing it. The key is understanding how the publisher is a resource which can help you succeed, it's not just a case of keeping them happy. Hopefully those two things are harmonious.

Yeo: The only other thing we've tried to do is make sure we have somebody as that buffer zone between the creative team and the publisher. The filter is important, so the team doesn't get an 'us and them' attitude.

Price: Yeah. The moment you start developing an adverse relationship with your publisher, it's all over. You have to look at it as a symbiotic relationship.

Going Forward

Edge: Insomniac and Seven Studios have already announced support for PlayStation2. And we're hearing publishers predict a decline in the PC market in 2000. What do you think?

Patmore: PC will never die.

Garden: PC is changing.

Patmore: It's just evolving.

Garden: I'm not a hardware evangelist. I don't believe in any one platform over another. Our choice to develop for platforms is purely a business decision. When we started with the PC we made the decision not to sell the highest number of units but to minimise our development risk. We wanted to be able to make the best game that we could with the least amount of risk to establish our brand name and a franchise. The PC was the logical choice. It was the cheapest development system with the best development tools and the largest support community. I still consider the PC as a viable business interest.

Edge: And why aren't any of you supporting Dreamcast?

Price: We have a relationship with Sony, in the first place. And when you see what Sony's people have done with PlayStation1 and they tell you that they're going to do it again with PlayStation2, it's hard not to believe them.

Yeo: And when we've only got one chance at success, we need to get in on the ground floor of something that we can be competitive with. People on Dreamcast have had a year, maybe two, looking at it, before we've even got started.

Garden: You'd be going in with your first-generation Dreamcast title against other potentially third-gen titles. There's no way you can compete on the technology side. It's impossible.

Yeo: One of the big reasons we have chosen PlayStation2, in addition to hardware, is Sony. It's a pretty good bet.

Patmore: I think a lot of people missed the boat with Dreamcast.

NAME: **Ted Price**

AGE: **32**

COMPANY: **Insomniac Games**

JOB TITLE: **President and founder**

INSOMNIAC SOFTOGRAPHY: ***Disruptor, Spyro the Dragon, Spyro 2: Ripto's Revenge***



■ Clearly influenced by several Japanese console games, *Spyro The Dragon* was Insomniac's second published title. Expect a PS2 update

Began playing games aged seven. Used to hang out with a neighbour to play her parents' *Pong*. Started Insomniac in 1994 with Alex Hastings. Began developing *Disruptor* on 3DO (it was the only dev system he could afford) before bringing it to Universal Interactive where it became a PlayStation game. Insomniac has gone on to develop *Spyro the Dragon* and *Spyro 2: Ripto's Revenge*. It has grown to two teams and is now working on a PlayStation and PlayStation2 title.

NAME:
Alan Patmore

AGE:
29

COMPANY:
Surreal Software

JOB TITLE:
President/lead designer on *Drakan*

SURREAL SOFTOGRAPHY:
Drakan: Order Of The Flame



■ Patmore's inspiration for *Drakan* came directly from the fantasy games he played in his youth, specifically *Ultima* and *Wizardry*

Started playing games aged five. Graduated from college and spent days playing *Doom*. Formed Surreal Software with Stuart Denman, Nick Radovich, and Mike Nichols in 1996. Borrowed $10,000 from his father to buy four computers. Paid the loan back a year later. Completed *Drakan: Order of the Flame* in autumn 1999. Currently in development on a PlayStation2 title.

Garden: None of us believed. And we were all wrong.

Patmore: I really have to say this – I thought for about a year that Dreamcast was going to be a good system. But our contracts precluded us working with Sega.

Price: So it was timing for everybody.

Patmore: I would have loved to have ported *Drakan* to Dreamcast, but couldn't.

Edge: So what do you think is going to happen to Dreamcast?

Patmore: It'll stick around until PlayStation2 really makes its mark. I think it'll be the interim system. It's pretty hot right now. A lot of casual gamers don't necessarily want to get a PC or they don't have a PC. They think their PlayStation's dated. They see *NFL 2K* and go: "Wow! That looks great, I'm going to buy that!" The price point's there, so they get it. It sold well back at Christmas.

Garden: I think it depends on how committed Sega is, you know? Right now Sega has just followed a standard console business model. And it's selling, everyone's happy, and everything's good. But I think its retail support is crap and its point of sale is crap. It just follows whatever model it's following. I don't think Sega knows what it wants to do. But if it decides to get serious, I think it could give PlayStation2 a strong run for its money. But Sega would need to whack the price down now, take a huge loss, ship a ton of units, and really establish Dreamcast within the mass market and create a market for the long term.

Edge: What about Sony? Do you really think PlayStation2 is a guaranteed hit?

Price: Anybody can misstep when bringing out a new system. We've seen that over and over again. But Sony has proved it's going to stick to what it says. If you look at the momentum that it has built, the number of developers it has been recruiting for PlayStation2 and at the types of titles that are going to come out with the launch, it's hard to believe this won't be a huge success.

Edge: Sega is going to have online games for Dreamcast later this year. Sony is talking about broadband communities, too. But if Sony and Sega build it, will gamers come?

Yeo: They've tried this before, and it's so hard to have a community without a really good interface, like a keyboard.

Garden: Amen. And if you're in the living room, where do you put the keyboard? That's the biggest problem. Where do you put it? It doesn't sit on your coffee table.

Price: And then you've got the bandwidth problems. I mean, God, if everybody had broadband access, that would be great.

Patmore: I think it's a start of something that's going to be big.

Price: Yeah, in a couple years.

Patmore: Actually, I think it's going to be a real niche thing.

Yeo: Yeah, I think you've still got a lot of years before console games have to have a multiplayer component to be successful. Even PC games still don't have to have it.

Price: Actually, I think it will be sooner than we think, because broadband has been making such inroads, quietly, in America.

PlayStation2 Issues

Edge: Those of you who have PS2 development kits could only have got hold of them fairly recently. And certainly not with 18 months lead time on the western release. How much of a problem has that been?

Price: With our development cycle, it wouldn't have mattered. We were trying

"There are already 6,000 **products available for PlayStation2 the day it ships. It's just too** depressing to consider. It's almost impossible **for anyone to beat Sony"**

Alex Garden, Relic Entertainment



Photography: Stephen Austin Welch

to finish *Spyro 2*, and if we had got a PlayStation2 development system in January or February last year, we probably wouldn't have finished *Spyro 2*! We didn't need that distraction.

Yeo: If we had wanted to release a PlayStation2 title in 2000, we wouldn't have been able to do it. Because we have kind of started from scratch, we wouldn't have been able to put out the type of game that we would have wanted, with the kind of quality that consumers are going to expect in 2000. It would have taken a lot more lead time than just this year.

Edge: Do you think that gives Dreamcast an edge, when PlayStation2 is launched? If top-tier western developers are not going to have games available?

Price: No, I don't think so. Dreamcast will have a fairly impressive library at that point. My guess is that Sony's marketing campaign is going to address that issue and show consumers that there's this avalanche of titles coming for the PlayStation2.

Garden: With backwards compatibility, there are already, like, 6,000 products available for the PlayStation2 the day it ships. None of us even talk about it because it's just too depressing to consider. If you put that into the mix, it's almost impossible for anyone to beat Sony.

Price: But it's important for Sega and Nintendo to survive. There have to be competitive players in this industry because it continues to push the different systems to the next level.

Garden: The PlayStation3 would be a piece of crap otherwise.

Edge: We haven't talked about Dolphin or X-Box.

Patmore: [Grinning] Yeah, we can't...

Garden: What are they?

Patmore: What are you talking about?

Edge: Nintendo 64 is rapidly slowing down. Dolphin development doesn't seem like it's ramping up very fast. Is there any way that Nintendo is finished in the console business?

Price: No!

Patmore: Never count Nintendo out.

Yeo: No. Not when you have that much money in the bank.

Garden: When you have Shigeru Miyamoto and a library of intellectual properties to rival any film studio, there's nothing you can't do. Nintendo is not a successful game developer – Nintendo is a successful phenomenon creator. That's where it makes its money. If you look at what Nintendo has done and what it really understands, you see that what makes it powerful is that it doesn't create games and franchises. It creates phenomena. It's something that goes beyond the franchise. No one else can do that.

Edge: Given what's publicly known about Dolphin – that it's going to have a 400Mhz processor, that Art X is designing the chip, that it's a DVD-driven machine but probably won't play movies in the west in order to keep the price point down – do you think that it will be viable?

Patmore: I'm sure it will be a good system.

Garden: Nintendo would be wasting money otherwise and damaging its name. Its name is important above all else. So yeah, it'll be viable. I won't relegate it to Amiga status but it may become the Macintosh of gaming. I'm not trying to be rude. [Laughs.] I actually have more respect for Nintendo as a content company than I probably do for any other company in the industry, just because it was such an influence on me when I was growing up. But I don't think it is in business to be number one. Honestly, I think it is in business to deploy its phenomena. That's my impression.

The Next Generation

Edge: You all represent the second generation of game developers. You grew up with games. You have been playing them your entire lives. You've had the benefit of seeing everything that's gone on in the last 25 years. How does that affect the kind of games that you make?

Yeo: Well, you know, in some ways it's a tremendous benefit. You get the benefit of seeing what's gone on, but at the same time a lot of things have already been done. So it's a boon and a bane. You want to try to do something new, so you look a little harder for something new and something old. You borrow from all that's successful, but you try to break out in certain other areas. Good products are a mix of old and new.

Patmore: Yeah, I think the benefit of

having grown up with games is that it gives you a real big pool of ideas. The games that I grew up with had a tremendous impact on my life and my imagination. And that has definitely gone into my design. When I see what I liked when I was young there's almost a nostalgic feel. I want to create the wonder of those worlds with the new technology that we have, because games have radically changed in the last several years with the advent of 3D.

Price: I'm a little bit uncomfortable with that question, especially because I'm not the lead designer at Insomniac. In fact, we don't have lead designers. Everybody participates. Everybody at the company has pretty much grown up with games. We take games for granted, and we also take it for granted that we try to create new experiences, no matter what the platform is, no matter how many successes or failures we've had.

Everybody at Insomniac builds on their past experiences, playing *Pong* or Atari 2600 or whatever, and wants to tell a better story and create better gameplay every time. When you're kind of referring to us as visionaries or whatever, I know that from Insomniac's perspective it's never really been that way. It's really been about a group of people, though that may sound kind of corny.

Garden: No, it's true.

Price: As business leaders our job is to make sure that our people have everything they need to do their jobs. If we're good at doing that we are going to create great games because it takes the pressure off everybody else – not worrying about whether they're going to get paid.

Garden: The bottom line, I think, is this. The previous generation, if you want to call it that – Peter Molyneux, Shigeru Miyamoto, and Sid Meier – created the industry. They were the pioneers. Our generation was born into the industry. And I think that it's more a part of who we are than it is a vision of what we want, because we're children of the industry. We all look at ourselves as creative people devoted to the creative process, making the best games in the world and the most convincing experiences, having as much fun as we can doing it.

But in the same breath we're also businessmen. And we can appreciate the importance of being profitable and running an equitable business and being a viable corporation. So I guess the difference is that the industry isn't what we've made it, but really, culturally, games are a part of who we are.



#1



SCENE: CORRIDOR PURSUIT/CORRIDOR
DESCRIPTION: CLAIRE RUNS TOWARDS CAMERA, FLEEING FROM UNSPECIFIED ASSAILANTS

#2



SCENE: CORRIDOR PURSUIT/WINDOW AT END OF CORRIDOR
DESCRIPTION: CLAIRE HALTS AT WINDOW AS HEAVILY ARMED HELICOPTER HOVERS OUTSIDE

#5



SCENE: CORRIDOR PURSUIT/PASSAGEWAY WITH WINDOWS TO LEFT OF CAMERA
DESCRIPTION: CLAIRE RUNS FROM HELICOPTER AS GLASS SHATTERS

#6



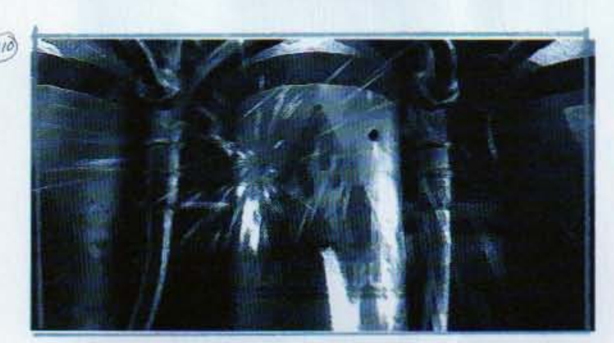
SCENE: STANDOFF/WIDE SHOT BEHIND CLAIRE
DESCRIPTION: CLAIRE ARRIVES IN LARGE ROOM. AUDIO: SUDDEN CACOPHONY OF GUNS COCKING. CLAIRE FACES OVERWHELMING ASSAILANTS

#9



SCENE: STANDOFF/FOCUS ON CLAIRE (SLOW MOTION)
DESCRIPTION: CATCHING FALLING GUN, CLAIRE SHOOTS INTO CAMERA

#10



SCENE: STANDOFF/SHOT OF EXPLOSIVE CANISTER
DESCRIPTION: BULLET STRIKES EXPLOSIVE CANISTER

Telling tales

#3



SCENE: CORRIDOR PURSUIT/WINDOW AT END OF CORRIDOR
DESCRIPTION: AS HELICOPTER OPENS FIRE, CLAIRE DIVES FROM PATH OF ONRUSHING BULLETS. WINDOW SMASHES; ASSAILANTS KILLED

#4



SCENE: CORRIDOR PURSUIT/EXTERIOR VIEW OF HELICOPTER FIRING
DESCRIPTION: HELICOPTER RAKES CLAIRE'S APPROXIMATE POSITION IN BUILDING WITH MACHINE-GUN FIRE

#7



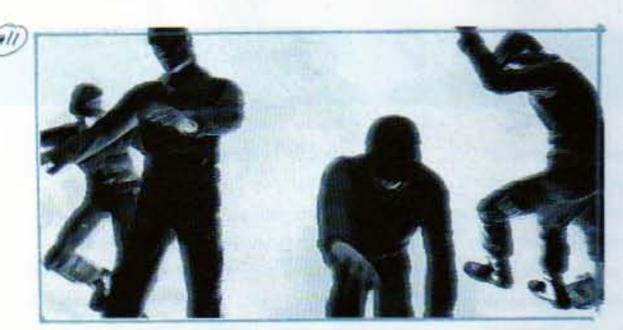
SCENE: STANDOFF/FOCUS ON CLAIRE
DESCRIPTION: ESPYING EXPLOSIVE CANISTER BEHIND ARMED FORCE AHEAD, CLAIRE HOLDS UP HANDS

#8



SCENE: STANDOFF/FOCUS ON CLAIRE (SLOW MOTION)
DESCRIPTION: CLAIRE DROPS GUN AND, AFTER FRACTION OF SECOND IN REAL TIME, BEGINS SIDEWAYS DIVE TO FLOOR

#11



SCENE: STANDOFF/EXPLOSION
DESCRIPTION: CLAIRE'S AGGRESSORS ARE HURLED FROM FEET BY FORCE OF EXPLOSION

#12



SCENE: STANDOFF/DEVASTATED ROOM
DESCRIPTION: AS DEBRIS SETTLES, IT IS EVIDENT THAT CLAIRE HAS NEUTRALISED ASSAILANTS

The art of storytelling may be a firmly established element of cinema and literary fiction, but in terms of plotting, games are stuck in first gear. **Edge** discovers why, and talks to three creatives intent on exploring solutions

Videogames are still in the infancy of storytelling. Despite a handful of noble exceptions, more than 20 years of progress has offered narrative events comparable only with the most banal Hollywood offerings. Blame the scriptwriters, berate the technology, lament the lack of funding – but it is clear that storytelling in the videogame industry is handicapped by interactivity and money. The stories vary in flamboyance from a one-line command in a manual – 'Save the Earth from the Space Invaders!' – to film-style footage. More recent puzzle games tend to shun the minimalist approach. Developers are finally waking up and realising just how much story content, no matter how elementary, enhances play.

Many cinematic sequences display a tenuous link with the game's title, but sometimes their credibility is a crucial means of establishing continuity between levels or areas. Take a look at Westwood's *Command & Conquer*. The unfolding battle between NOD and GDI not only acts as window dressing to its level-based structure, it represents an award for a player's labours. The same can be said of *Tomb Raider*. These prerendered asides also allow developers to present scenes that current polygon engines or budgets prevent. An example is Lara's daring ascent to the top of the Natla Technologies building. Ironically, the creators of 'The Matrix' seem to have borrowed the scene.



***Shenmue*'s Quick Time Events work, but they hardly represent the future of interactivity. Developers rarely have the cash to choreograph such luxuries**





When an action sequence involves a unique situation – like the above scene from *Half-Life* – it can have subtle yet significant narrative quality

Occasionally, an action game will use realtime story elements. As the much celebrated *Half-Life* illustrates, a compelling yarn and the odd well-timed scripted event can elevate the great to the sublime. Sadly, the use of compelling story updates is an awkward, imprecise affair. If a player can move, shoot and use objects, he can effectively 'break' a sequence.

So designers face a stark choice. Either place barriers that prevent player interference or cater for many possible outcomes. As the latter is time consuming and expensive, it's no wonder that the few designers brave enough to use this technique are forced to, in effect, cheat. When *Half-Life* presents a scene where a scientist or security guard dies, it carefully places events behind a bullet-proof barrier, neatly avoiding awkward situations. But should an NPC essential to progression die, it is forced to ask the player to reload and try again. Opinions differ on whether Valve had any alternative.

Narrative and interactivity are not mutually exclusive, but reconciling the two can prove enormously difficult. Small wonder, then, that many designers favour linear scripting and clearly defined boundaries between story and gameplay. As much as any gamer would like to participate fully in tantalising, preordained cut-scenes, to allow them to indulge in these would be a logistical nightmare. It's possible to allow a basic form of interaction, as with the Quick Time events of *Shenmue*, or the occasional piece of *FFVIII*'s FMV, but developers must have the time and cash to choreograph what is, in many ways, a luxury. Not many codeshops can boast an abundance of either.

The vast majority of videogames are less sophisticated than even the average comic strip when it comes to communicating emotion. Outside of the lavish excesses of its FMV sequences, *FFVIII*'s Squall and his companions are less expressive than Snoopy. SquareSoft

uses simple visual signposting to underline character response to the plot – Zell trembles to represent anger, Selphie jumps to signify feminine glee, and Rinoa has a specific bashful pose that is repeated *ad nauseam* as her relationship with Squall develops. These animations are repeated endlessly, but it would be wrong to hammer *FFVIII*'s designers or artists.

The PlayStation's limits prevent anything of greater complexity. With better hardware, more life-like acting is becoming a reality. *Shenmue* is simply the beginning. A silver lining is becoming visible, but it's still well and truly behind its large grey cloud. To expect artists to be well versed in the nuances of the performing arts is naive.

Motion capture is one possible answer – even if it is merely used as a guideline for crayon-wielding staff to work from. But it's still a time- and cash-consuming process. Creating convincing virtual actors is a multi-discipline skill. Besides, it could be argued that the industry is trying to run before it can even walk.

Seasoned players know that the standard of voice acting in videogames is frequently poor. Mindful of budgets and often ignorant of how television and movie companies approach the casting procedure, many developers are disturbingly willing to make do with 'amateur'-sounding theatrics. Certain performances beggar belief, especially when it's evident that the actor or actress in question does not have a clue about the subject matter. If the original script is poor, it compounds the problem.

At the initial design stage, the creators of an adventure have a clear choice. They can opt for a text-only system, as developers of Japanese RPGs unashamedly do, or go for what is perceived as being the crowd pleaser: a full voice track. Both systems have merits and drawbacks. But the latter is enormously restrictive, and potentially costly. That's why, during the wait for speech synthesis software or even hardware to catch up with the imaginations of industry creative types, text is seen as the preferable choice by many.

In many games, a writer simply prescribes set dialogue. Occasionally, codeshops that are feeling a bit flush will flirt with language generation or multiple responses. Unfortunately, such elements are beyond the resources and abilities of most development houses. They find it difficult enough to write one decent line of dialogue. So how about a handful? And the relevant response to suit each?

More than ever, the videogame industry needs to unearth new talent in a variety of areas – and hold on to it. The top of any developer's shopping list makes daunting reading: artists with an appreciation of body language, speech generation technicians for when the technology leaves its infancy, scriptwriters with an appreciation of contrasting film and game techniques… on go the demands. It is no wonder that development costs are forecast to double over the next few years.

How long do gamers have to wait before they get their own 'Pulp Fiction', 'The Usual Suspects', or 'Brazil'? Is the leap from *Colossal Cave* to 'Casino' one that will be made within the next decade? And will you need to press pause before picking up the popcorn? Perhaps numerous hands-off moments will present themselves. Money and time, but mostly money, will tell.

How long must gamers wait before we get our own 'Pulp Fiction', 'The Usual Suspects', or 'Brazil'? Will the leap from *Colossal Cave* to 'Casino' be made in the next decade?





Scriptwriters talk of conflicts and their resolutions; the obstacles which prevent a protagonist from progressing. We call it gameplay

Case Study #1
Metal Gear Solid



Konami résumé: Hideo Kojima's big-budget action thriller.
The plot in brief: A special forces operative tackles terrorists bent on unleashing a terrible weapon…
Why its story works: It provides context for the 'stealth' theme, but also runs in parallel with *MGS*'s gameplay. Its dialogue suffers from a dearth of subtlety, but the way in which its set pieces relate to its action is often quite effective. Snake's initial meeting with Meryl works well. The manner in which it blends in with the following action sequence stands out.
Why Hollywood has yet to call: The translation process appears to have been unkind to *MGS*. Certain aspects of its plot are weak and its use of English can be woefully clumsy. It's still a tad more cerebral than any Steven Segal action movie you care to mention, though.

Case Study #2
Half-Life



Valve résumé: A genre-defining, firstperson shoot 'em up.
The plot in brief: Gordon Freeman is a scientist at a top secret government research facility. One day things go horribly wrong and all hell – literally – breaks loose…
Why its story works: It's subtle. The premise is great, but it's the way that – with no tangible breaks in its action – *Half-Life* manages to spin an engrossing yarn. There's a real feeling of progression that so many other other FPS titles lack. And its events occur in real time. Brilliant.
Why Hollywood should call: It's an excellent idea for an action flick. Imagine the potential of Russell Crowe in the role of Freeman.







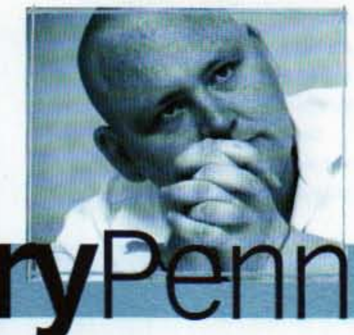






The most common use of storytelling in videogames is as a transitional device. Ordinary levels are passé

GaryPenn



Gary Penn is creative manager at Dundee's groundbreaking DMA Design. But he was also a journalist in the heyday of pioneering videogame magazines. So the Penn knows a thing or two about writing. "There are a lot of different types of writing required," he offers. "Each needs the author to have some kind of gaming experience. That's essential. They must remember that what the player reads, watches or listens to is never as much fun as what they are doing. It's a different type of art."

Edge: Until recently, and sometimes even now, a game's lead designer writes its script.

Gary Penn: That's probably because, historically, the programmer has done everything. It's something left over from the formative years. You had programmers doing art, graphics, sound, game design and the script.

Edge: Should external writing talent be a must for modern games which feature even minor narrative?

Penn: It depends what you want from your script. Dialogue is one type of writing. If you want a series of set pieces that fit in with some sort of narrative thread, that's another type of writing entirely. If you want mission briefings, that's different to dialogue, isn't it?

Edge: The text adventure was superseded by the graphic adventure. Now that too has, in many senses, died.

Penn: I wouldn't say it has necessarily died. It has evolved into something else. *Zelda*, in many respects, could be done as a text adventure, or as a graphic adventure. Obviously, it wouldn't be quite the same – so physical. I think the distinction with *Zelda* is that you're dealing with a highly visible toy set. If you're dealing with a text or graphic adventure, the toy set is more removed from view. You can access things you can't physically see.

You deal directly with more ethereal space with a text adventure. In a graphic adventure and a more physical arcade game you're dealing with virtual space. It's a lot easier to visualise and manipulate what's going on. Text adventures with graphics evolved into animated graphic adventures a long time ago. In that form they've died out.

But we've made the logical progression and focused on worlds that are more physically and vividly realised – like *Zelda*. You have more direct control over the character. You are still pursuing the same old trodden path, collecting objects and using them at certain points, but it's all that bit more physical. It uses storytelling to give a sense of purpose. Primarily, it's more of a narrative thread than a story in the traditional sense.

Edge: In games, interaction and plot development are often mutually exclusive. You get one or the other.

Penn: If you think about stories in a more traditional medium, like a book or magazine, the story is not necessarily going through a lot of physical issues. It's usually dealing with emotive or descriptive issues in the sense of environment or feelings, whereas games can be a lot more physical. When you have to deal with a character and talk about what's going on, it can only be interesting for so long. If you don't get to influence anything on a physical level it's not so interesting.

Edge: So how important do you feel scriptwriting in games is becoming?

Penn: Increasingly important. Especially as we move away from the old abstractions. A lot of games can be abstracted to a simplistic level. You can reduce them to a text or ASCII character based system. But that's not quite so enticing.

I was never a big fan of stories within games. It seemed kind of pointless. But you realise that it's the way you play with the toys that makes the difference. If you're playing with something like a remote-controlled car you don't need a story to make it fun. But if you're dealing with Barbie or Action Man, they usually come with the suggestion of a story or theme and you tend to make the rest up as you go along. So, in that instance,

story does become important because it gives a sense of direction. Many older games were more toy-centric – you were playing with remote-controlled toys without need for a story.

Edge: Could it be said that many stories are simply there to kickstart a player's imagination?

Penn: If one minute Lara Croft is in one environment pursuing one objective and then she suddenly jumps to another location, it would be awkward. It used to be acceptable to do that sort of thing, but as things become more vivid it's less acceptable to see that jarring jump – if you don't have some cement between contrasting levels.

Edge: Without the cut-scenes, some correspondents found it hard to muster the enthusiasm to complete the extra levels that Core released with the budget re-issues of *Tomb Raider 1* and 2.

Penn: I can understand that. The cut-scenes create a sense of direction, they make you feel that you are actually influencing something.

Edge: Some games appear to follow a narrative model similar to literature, while others favour cinema. While borrowing ideas from both is acceptable, do we need to formulate new ways in which to tell stories for games?

Penn: With text, you can use a couple of pages to set a scene. But you can probably describe it all in seconds with the correct lighting, colours and camera. So why use a load of verbose text to reiterate what you can already see? You want to get on with play. A certain degree of narrative cement is important, but the last thing you want is to read these lovely eloquent descriptions about what's what, only to have your illusions shattered by what you are physically allowed to do in the world.

So how do we do things as a film might, while creating something that you play? High physical demands can get in the way of a story, or a story can get in the way of interaction. This is why we have to abstract the whole process in order to understand it. It's similar to looking at a game and copying it without understanding how it works and why it's doing what it's doing. That's why a lot of clones are so appalling. They're versions of what's seen on the surface.

Developers don't understand how it works beneath the surface veneer. With stories, the same thing applies. We have to look at a higher level: why are film creators doing that? Only when we understand that can we present material in an interactive way. But how they're doing it is less important, because it's a different medium entirely. A lot of cinematic devices or ideas just wouldn't work in videogames because you're not a passive observer.

As a participant in, say, an adventure game, you need to be aroused by plot and purpose. But you also need pockets of freedom where you influence events. Otherwise you end up with a picture book where you just turn the pages. In many ways, we have to redefine how we tell stories. There's 20 years' worth of learning to be done.

Edge: Combine interactivity with a storyline and things often tend to get complicated.

Penn: Every feature within a scene increases the development complexity of a game. You have to cater for every feature to support interactivity. If you have two objects that can be used together, there aren't going to be a great deal of possible outcomes that the player might expect or attempt. But if you have four, five, or more objects that could conceivably interact, the possible permutations can be massive. You can reduce the complexity by ensuring objects or character X does not come into contact with Z, but doing so introduces issues, too.

The more freedom you give a player in any one area, the bigger the rod for your back. In *GTA*, for example, it was difficult to test alternative outcomes, so we had to make it very tightly controlled. It makes more sense to create the illusion of freedom.

Edge: Would you agree that, when compared to movies and books, the dialogue in games is often banal?

Penn: How much dialogue is colour, and how much is critical? With a lot of films, for example, it's usually colour. It's used to flesh out a character, but it's not usually critical to the story itself. Besides, it's possible to enjoy a bad story that's beautifully done. Take 'Gormenghast' – I found it very watchable and equally shit at the same time.

With a game, if you know the characters, motivation and objective, it's the environment that helps you tolerate cringe-worthy dialogue. The whole is greater than the small parts. Action movie dialogue tends to be awful, but you tend to overlook it because it's a small portion of why you are watching it. The same applies with games.

Besides, if you've got a good story to tell, it can be stupid to cover it up with flowery language and metaphors that are beyond the ken of most people. Until videogames attract a larger, more diverse audience, it could be argued that you've wasted your own time, because only a small proportion of people are going to understand the story. And if you are intent on creating a complex plot, with loads of cleverly crafted dialogue, there's another problem – how frequently and for how long is a player willing to sit and play that game? If they stop playing for a couple of nights or more, it's going to interfere with the way they can appreciate the storyline. It's not like 'EastEnders', which is cleverly crafted to fit into an easily digested half-hour story. With a game, you can stop where you like. That can screw up a story something rotten.

"It's not like 'EastEnders', which is cleverly crafted to fit into an easily digested half-hour story. With a game you can stop where you like. That can screw up a story something rotten"





Does *Final Fantasy VIII* offer over 80 hours of gameplay from start to finish? It's debatable. Large tracts of the game are passive events with limited participation

Case Study #3
Monkey Island



LucasArts résumé: Ron Gilbert's fondly remembered point 'n' click adventure.
The plot in brief: In his attempt to become a pirate, Guybrush Threepwood travels the Caribbean, falls in love, and fights an undead buccaneer...
Why its story works: It is genuinely, consistently, funny. Although there are few laugh-out-loud moments, *Monkey Island*'s clever humour is rarely, if ever, less than appealing. This makes it unique. Although technically dated, a recent repeat play demonstrated just how timeless its writing is. Mind you, it now seems far shorter than it did first time around.
Why Hollywood has yet to call: Some have described *Monkey Island*, being a LucasArts production, as 'the film that never was'. It might work as an animated film, but a scriptwriter would have to address the fact that many of its best lines relate to gameplay elements.

Case Study #4
Broken Sword



Revolution résumé: Charles Cecil's point 'n' click adventure opus.
The plot in brief: When a bomb explodes at a Parisian café, our hero gets drawn into a world of intrigue...
Why its story works: It's the contemporary setting that makes *Broken Sword* (and its sequel) so noteworthy. Gamers find recognisable environments beguiling. Although its puzzle logic can be frustrating at times, leading to near-aimless wandering, it's a masterpiece by videogame scripting standards.
Why Hollywood has yet to call: It's popular, but probably just not high profile enough.

CharlesCecil

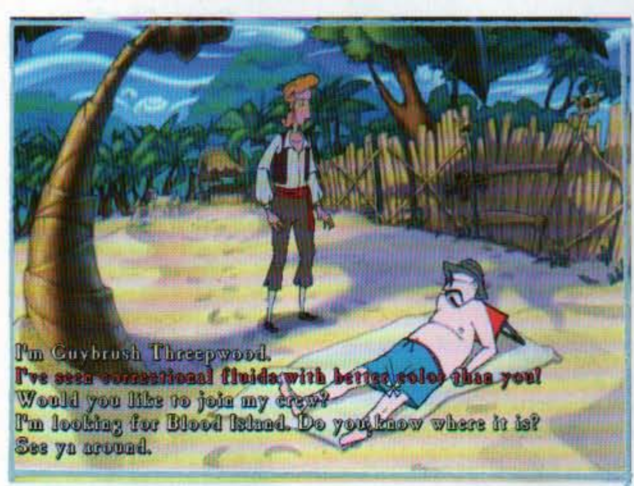
To **Charles Cecil**, MD of Revolution Software, a game's story is what makes or breaks play. He argues that there is no reason why a game cannot sustain intense narrative – it's just that developers are too heavily preoccupied with technology to think about scriptwriting.

Edge: Are certain adventure games too long to command attention, even with a tightly plotted, engrossing script?

Charles Cecil: I prefer to play a game where you can finish it in ten to 12 hours. I need to be driven by a good story. I don't think you can maintain a good story for 30 to 40 hours. You can maintain an exciting environment – *Zelda* and *Final Fantasy* do.

Edge: If you only play for half an hour or so per night, it's going to be hard to enjoy the atmosphere.

Cecil: This is a problem. When we write narrative games, if someone goes away for a week and comes back, how do they pick up where they left off? It depends on whether you want to base your games on a literature-style model broken into chapters, or expect your audience to experience it continuously.



Writing one strand of compelling dialogue is hard enough. Skilled wordsmiths are becoming increasingly important to the games industry

Edge: Do you think plot-driven games should be more episodic?

Cecil: Difficult question. You could define an episode as where you move from one point to another, or you could define an episode as letting the tension off before building it up again. There's such a wide variety of approaches. I prefer to keep the pressure up.

With something like *Monkey Island*, which is very jokey, it's easier to go down the episode route. You can afford to deliver the punchline at the end of each episode. Each one needs to be self-contained with a pay-off, a sub plot and a main plot. In a lighthearted environment that's easier to do. It's much harder to take a dramatic approach where you want to keep pressure up.

With *Monkey Island*, at the end of the first episode you can turn the computer off, go to bed and say: "That was great and I'm looking forward to playing episode two." But with *Silent Hill*, for example, when you get into hospital you will not go to bed at that point, because you'd really want to know what happens next. I prefer the latter. Keep the tension up so the player really wants to know what happens next.

Edge: *Ocarina of Time* seems like one good game that offers an approachable, episode experience

Cecil: Something like *Zelda* is more about environment than narrative. I think you need to be completely engrossed by that environment, and driven by it, because in a game that massive the narrative has to take second place. If I stop playing when I'm really excited by a game environment, and return the next day, I'm not nearly as enthusiastic, because the spell has been broken. With a narrative, that stays in your mind and you really want to know what happens next. In an environment-based game, I don't think you care as much what happens next.

Edge: It would be an idea to use some kind of device which gives players a brief recap of events when they resume play. A kind of 'story so far' technique.

Cecil: We keep talking about this sort of thing but very rarely do it. I'm not quite sure why. It sounds like a great idea. But perhaps we should be looking at this another way. When people get stuck, and they can't get past obstacles, we really ought to have a system where the game recognises your plight and gives you more help, accordingly.

This kind of idea is great in theory and quite rightly should be done, but we never do it. Maybe it's because by the time you come to the end of the development period, there's so much pressure that this gets overlooked.

Edge: Isn't there a danger that overt assistance can fracture the reality of a narrative, or the atmosphere?

Cecil: Yes. And it should be that the player asks for that help. It would be incredibly frustrating if you were really interested by a particular problem, but couldn't solve it just yet, and the game came in and told you how to do it.

Edge: If a player gets stuck on puzzle and the progression-based narrative grinds to a halt, there's a real danger that he could lose interest – and be put off buying a sequel. Does it not make greater sense to cater for the lowest common denominator when writing puzzle and plot scripts?



Cecil: Should you hold the player's hand and guide them on every step? In my opinion, in a narrative game – and we're doing this in our current game – we should adhere to the rule that a player should always know what they're meant to be doing, but not how. We design our games to create an environment that will excite the player. We initially give them a small area to explore so that they can learn what they are doing. Only then do we allow them to proceed to larger obstacles.

It's essential, though, that at every point they know what their objective is. That can be achieved by ensuring plot structure and narrative are tied together. I believe that means puzzles must be directly related to the plot. But few companies seem capable of doing this. LucasArts is a master of the comic genre. When other companies try to create games like *Monkey Island* they mess it up with obscure puzzles that aren't fun. It's a lot easier to come up with jokey puzzles that are related to the plot.

I think that if you want to retain your suspension of disbelief, then you need to ensure that puzzles drive the plot forward. Likewise, the plot should reveal the puzzles. It's the same with many films. If you think of the first 'Star Wars' when Luke Skywalker returns to the ranch to find it burning, the audience knows that by the end he will have hunted down the people responsible and he'll kill them. So it would be a big mistake to think that the player or film viewer doesn't know what's going to happen. Every time you watch a good film, you know what's going to happen at the end – you don't know how. It's the same with games.

Edge: It seems that variable outcomes and a high degree of interactivity cause enormous headaches for those who write game scripts. The slightest thing can erode the feel of reality in a virtual environment. Take *Nocturne*. In one scene you can plunge a room into a murky gloom and yet the people in there still relate their scripts as normal.

Cecil: Our current game is going through the same thing. We're looking to address that kind of problem. For games and writing dialogue in other mediums. In general, writing is appallingly handled where games are concerned. I also think that different cultures have different writing styles – it's a big mistake when Japanese epics are not rewritten. I found the dialogue for *Metal Gear Solid* tedious. I have no doubt that to a Japanese audience it was spot on. It's a big mistake not to consider different cultural audiences and adapt accordingly.

Edge: Given that so many pillar releases are of Japanese origin, it seems strange that so many companies are happy to settle for pidgin English and awkward Americanisms.

Cecil: In Europe, we are especially aware of the processes involved for a game to be translated into other languages. The French and Germans demand high-quality translation and acting. As a European developer, we take that extremely seriously, so our whole development cycle focuses on the fact that we need to deliver high quality in the main languages. The Americans and Japanese don't really think that way.

Edge: Obviously, there's a need to make games approachable on a

and dialogue. You spend the first two thirds of the game working towards a point where you know how you ended up in that scenario.

You then spend the last third of the game working towards the resolution. This kind of narrative structure has been popular over the last decade, because it's such an exciting and dynamic way of telling a story. Because *In Cold Blood*'s theme is betrayal we have tried to play with relationships between the player and the other characters. We lay false trails and play with emotions, the way you perceive the people you interact with. There are so many techniques you can use.

Edge: Can game scripts engross players in the same way as a film or book might?



***Broken Sword*'s environments are beguiling. Did its contemporary setting influence its many buyers?**

Case Study #5
Tomb Raider



Core Design résumé: Massive leftfield hit enjoying a fancy figure franchise.
The plot in brief: Ample-chested archeologist sets off in search of mystical artifact, and finds Atlantis…
Why its story works: The script and execution of *Tomb Raider*'s story are exquisite. Okay, so the premise is nothing special, but some of the scenes – Lara jumping over a cliff to avoid execution, and using an elevator in an unusual way – are genuinely exciting. It makes perfect use of prerendered sequences to add credibility and reward to an action game.
Why Hollywood called: Lara is – and you may well mutter at the back there – a videogaming phenomenon. The brief behind her exploits cries out to be 'action movie'. And it's been a few years since the likes of 'The Last Crusade' and 'Romancing the Stone'. A genre revival has been on the cards for a while.

"Writing is appallingly handled where games are concerned. I also think that different cultures have different writing styles. It's a big mistake when Japanese epics are not rewritten"

many years to come, we will have to record the dialogue of actors because speech synthesis which delivers emotion is a long way off. We do need to script and then record every line with actors. You get an explosion of combinations, which is why you need to control the environment.

Either you determine what people say algorithmically – in which case you don't record what they say, and you have an enormous amount of combinations – or you control the environment carefully. I think nothing is lost by controlling the environment, provided that you give a reasonable degree of freedom. I think people want to feel they are following a narrative. There is a difference between something like *Ultima*, in which you can do anything to anybody, and a narrative game where you follow a plot.

Edge: Would you agree that the standard of scripts in videogames is almost consistently poor?

Cecil: *In Cold Blood* is written with high-quality writers who have experience of

physical level. But that doesn't mean that every adventure game must have derivative, by-the-numbers plot and dialogue.

Cecil: Our current game, *In Cold Blood*, is not an adventure game – it's a narrative-driven action game. With many narratives, you have an exciting incident that throws the character's world into turmoil and sets him on his way. Being a great fan of 'The Usual Suspects' and 'Pulp Fiction', it struck me that there was no reason for us to be linear in time. We start the game with the player having various weird memories, and then having his head pulled out of a trough of bloody water. He's being interrogated so harshly that he's forgotten his past.

As the interrogator asks questions, his memories return. The player learns the information at the same time. We start the game two thirds of the way through. His opening words are: "I was betrayed. How could it have gone so wrong?" We set up this anticipation. We have some good writers working on story

Cecil: Hollywood has taught us certain rules which work well. I think we need to be aware of what those rules are and respect them. We do need to write our own rules at times, because we're not writing films or books, but I'm sure that storytelling is a technique that we can and must learn from other mediums, so that we can write our own. Anyone who dismisses other mediums is likely to fail in the attempt to write a good narrative.

Edge: Mixing interactivity with complex scripting and accomplished dialogue is time and labour intensive.

Cecil: Too many people are fixated with the technology, when we need to focus on storytelling. Of course technology is an issue. But how do we improve the quality of game acting, for example? Take *Shenmue*. The acting in that is of high quality, but it cost $40m dollars to produce. So how do we, in the real world, with a fraction of those resources, ensure we have great acting?

Case Study #6
Resident Evil



Capcom résumé: Romero- and *Alone In The Dark*-inspired survival horror gem.
The plot in brief: A special forces team investigates spooky mansion, and gets torn to pieces by the undead…
Why its story works: *Resident Evil* is, without question, one of the most captivating, atmospheric games ever created. Genuinely frightening (or, at least, alarming) in places, the manner in which it dripfeeds backplot to the player is excellent. It's a shame, then, that its dialogue and intro sequences are truly appalling.
Why Hollywood should call: Zombie flicks have been off the menu for a while. A revisit is long overdue.

The biggest challenge facing game scriptwriters in the future will be in moving away from providing a whole linear storyline and backbone, predicts **Demis Hassabis**. The founder of Elixir Studios expects the biggest breakthrough to arrive when writers can script certain elements for events to react to what a player might do.

"We're waiting for natural language processing, the art of artificially generating speech and language to get better," he explains. "We are years, probably decades away from achieving that. With an online game you have the possibility of adding to an ongoing world, maybe adding according to the direction the player community is going. Or perhaps participating by writing emails back to people pretending to be a character." Hassabis set out his own vision for the future of game script writing at a Writing for Interactive Media conference, held at BAFTA's Piccadilly building. The following is a transcription of that vision.

In the beginning…

"Storytelling games started before computer games, really, with games such as Dungeons & Dragons – the RPGs, where you've basically got a gamesmaster, another player who's in charge of the way the story heads, and players who actively create the story. This directly inspired games like the text-based MUDs. These were really the first games to use storylines. The first ones were done about 20 years ago on big university mainframes.

Following these were early games like *Space Invaders*. Of course, these were around the same time as MUDs, but they didn't have any storyline, save for a sort of throwaway one-liner to contextualise the action. With *Space Invaders*, some Martians were landing, and you had to shoot them all – that was the storyline!

In a lot of ways we haven't moved on a lot. Games like *Quake* and *Doom* are incredibly hi-tech and fantastic to play, but they still have the same storyline as *Space Invaders*. You've got aliens coming down, or sort of mutants, and you've got to shoot them and save the world.

Then you've got the point-and-click adventures, like *Myst*. It's like reading an interactive book. Most of the time they offer beautifully rendered environments – paintings that you can interact with – and you basically solve puzzles. Another example of this is *The 7th Guest*. Because of the visual appeal and ease of play, they became massmarket products. They didn't have any sort of barriers to entry.

Then things moved on to what was called the interactive movie, which is now notorious. You don't want to be labelled an interactive movie. One of the first to coin this phrase was the *Wing Commander* series. Interspersed with the action elements of the game was a rather crass story. It was like a poor man's movie and the game suffered because of it. A lot of the budget was spent on the interactive movie parts and they didn't stand up to the quality of, say, Hollywood films because obviously they were made on one tenth of the budget.

I think we may see the renaissance of this type of game with the advent of DVD, simply because we've got so much space to fill. How much artwork can we generate ourselves? I don't necessarily think this is a good thing, but commercially they'll probably be successful.



Like a bowl of spaghetti, *Baldur's Gate* comprises numerous interwoven strands. It's notable for its complexity

Now: to the current state of the art, which is *Final Fantasy VIII* and, just recently, *Shenmue*. The *Final Fantasy* games are probably the most successful series. You are a central character and you take part in this huge adventure. If we are going to do interactive movies, we should do them like that. Get away from filming actors and so on, but have it all in game. *Shenmue* takes this even further by setting things in the real world, rather than a fantasy cartoon world.

So that's where we've come from – and it isn't really a long way, to be honest. This is currently what stories are used for in games. Firstly, they've been used as the crux of the game so far. These are the adventure games or the detective games where you've got to work something out and the storyline is the whole game.

The second type of thing is to provide the setting and the background – when games come with little novellas or manuals which give background information about the characters involved. This is a static part of the game that the player is supposed to look when he wants to find out more. So it's more a way to add depth to an otherwise fairly hollow experience. Games like *Elite* do this. It's a sparse universe with all the stories randomly generated, but with a really cool novella which describes the whole universe and what you are doing there. It sets the tone.

Recently, the story has been used as a reward. The unravelling of the story is a reward mechanism used when someone completes a level. This is used in current realtime strategy games where, when you complete a level, you get the next beautifully rendered bit of the story. To find out what happens next you've got to reach the next level – like in soap operas.

Finally, stories are being used as a gameplay mechanic. The story is often used to drive the gameplay. Clues are given as to where to go next or how to solve puzzles, such as in *Half-Life* and *Metal Gear Solid*, where there are scenes used within the game to explain what is going to happen to you.

So what's holding us back? What challenges do games pose to effective story telling? I think that because we are only in the embryonic stages of this kind of medium, we don't really know how to do a lot of things that are taken for granted in other mediums. How do we engage the player's emotions? Very few games do that. Shigeru Miyamoto is probably the best designer in the world. He, in my opinion, is the person who understands best how a child thinks and how to engage a child and surprise him at the right moments. But this is very much a black art at the moment. We don't really understand how to do it and how to reproduce it.

From a design point of view it's very frustrating. We have huge ambitious visions but we have to wait for technology to catch up. It's not that we're any less creative than, say, authors or film directors, but the medium we have to work with is a lot more constraining. Sometimes, I'm quite envious of novel writers. In some senses they can see farthest into the future, because their medium is people's minds. There are no limits to what they can conjure up. Film is pretty much constrained by what can be shown and games even more so.



DemisHassabis

We can't even portray 'today' with any real semblance of reality.

Game designers have to cope with hundreds of different actions that a player can make. We could constrain it so that you'd have a linear storyline, but in my opinion that's not the way we should take games. You can get that, and better, in other mediums. The nice thing about games is that they allow players to make choices. But to make every choice interesting would be like having to write 100 different scripts for one film. And the problem with non-linearity is the amount of artwork involved. If you use film footage, you can't manipulate it fully. If you want to add in a couple more after you finish production, you can't because you haven't got the footage. If they were virtual characters you could, but the problem is then producing the artwork involved.

I refer to a multimedia Web site, Virtual Caroline, where visitors watch videos of and make choices for the

titular star. Producing the house or kitchen that Caroline lives in would take two artists one year's work. Even tiny details take time – the things you take for granted, like the dust on the desktop, the little nuts and bolts and things which make the world come to life. If they weren't there, people would miss it. *Final Fantasy VIII*, which is a linear game, cost about $70m to make, with an army of 400 artists working for two years. In the west, we simply can't compete with those production values and resources.

Then we have artificial intelligence: creating believable characters and environments. This is incredibly hard. We're nowhere near doing this. Even in *Final Fantasy VIII*, you go and talk to a character and they'll have three stock responses. The thing I find frustrating is that when I go back to that character half an hour later, he will say exactly the same thing to me. But to make it say something different and intelligent, depending on what I did in the last half hour, is incredibly difficult.

One way around this is to go online and have massive multiplayer worlds like *Ultima Online*, *Asheron's Call* and *Everquest*. These are the new RPGs. They're basically like the MUDs, but with a nice graphical front-end. Have people playing all the characters – that way they are all intelligent. There are a couple of problems with this. People always want to play games on their own. Secondly you can't tell people what to do and how to behave. If one person chooses not to participate correctly, and just decides to just go around being an idiot, it can ruin the whole experience for everybody. In a virtual world it's easy to get away with it – there is no shame of being spotted by everyone else.

With *Ultima Online*, a lot of problems happened when people, instead of playing the game, would run around the countryside in this huge sort of fantasy world and kill all the new players who didn't know how to fight back. I had a lot of friends who didn't know the game, went online, didn't know the controls or whatever, but thought it would be fascinating. But then a big knight comes up and says "Who are you?" and they reply "I'm a new player." And get hit over the head. End of game. They've looked at ways of stopping this, like a police force, but who wants to be the policeman online?

We've got to improve AI to move forward in storytelling. Then you've got graphics and portraying a plausible reality. No one's going to get emotionally engaged in what you are trying to do if it's just a blob on the screen. People in the industry reminisce about how great games of the '80s were. Yes, they were great from the purist's point of view. But you can't get emotionally involved with a block that's supposed to be a person unless they look realistic, engaging and worth caring about. This problem is the closest to having a solution. I reckon we're five to ten years away from photorealism.

Finally, let's consider the difficulty in communicating with stories in games as opposed to other forms of media. There are several problems with games and any type of interactive media that you don't have to deal with in books and films. You have to deal with controlling strands and people not being very good at interacting with these environments.

Let's use an example: you have a sophisticated 40-level game with a Shakespearean twist in the storyline. But if someone isn't capable of getting to level 40, they'll never see it. They are more likely to get to level 20, get fed up of the game and quit. If you make a game too easy, then you're not catering for the hardcore player. You have to cope with a huge range of abilities. If you are writing films and books you don't have to worry about that. Your audience may not understand all the nuances – but they will be there with you at the end. You drag them along with you even if they haven't understood the concept as a whole. We have to dumb down some of our creativity to guarantee commercial success.

Games cost a lot of money to make – in the west nowadays at least £2m. No one will give you that kind of money unless they can guarantee some kind of commercial success. That means selling to the mass market and having to dumb down your content. An analogy might be writing a masterpiece book and then going through and cutting out all the words that are more than eight letters long so a ten-year-old can read it. It completely destroys your art. In fact, in games, it's not the ten-year-olds but the 50-year-olds that are your problem. The designer is blamed if the player can't use the interface properly.

You could say "Why is he talking about all this technology? If you have a great storyline that's all you should need. You should be able to make it on a £10K budget." Unfortunately, things like arthouse films don't exist in the games industry. They don't work because, in arthouse films, what works is the ideas and the interaction of the intelligent characters and their performance. In a game, to get a good performance, you have to have great AI, great art – and that's what costs all the money. You can't just get a good actor who'll do it as a favour for you. You try to keep as much in as possible without losing the mainstream.



Crafting atmospheric moments with an in-game engine – like the above scene from *MGS* – takes a lot of time

"Sometimes, I'm quite envious of novel writers. There are no limits to what they can conjure up. We can't even portray today with any semblance of reality"

So what is the role of the writer in games at the moment? Currently it's traditional. They script the story which drives the game or provides the setting. But there are alternatives, like the emerging storyline – which I'm doing with my game. Instead of creating a story *per se*, we create an environment that the player is put into. He will do things and the environment will react in an intelligent and interesting manner. Ideally, if it's truly freeform, there's no way the designer can know where the player is going. He can only be sure of the boundaries. Of course, we have to constrain him and make sure decisions are obvious, but I like to hide the fact that the player is making a decision at all. It's kind of a perception thing. This is a huge challenge to designers and writers."

Case Study #7
Baldur's Gate



Bioware's résumé: Sprawling AD&D-licensed roleplaying game.
The plot in brief: Young man/girl/elf/dwarf seeks fortune in wider world after guardian is slain…
Why its story works: Although its plot strands are, by and large, pure Dungeons & Dragons fodder, it's the sheer number of them that has made *Baldur's Gate* so popular. You can be involved in several quests or intrigues at any one time and almost every world inhabitant has plenty to say. An excellent reputation system tailors their response and attitude towards your character, too. Outstandingly freeform.
Why Hollywood has yet to call: The developer has ploughed all its money into the forthcoming 'Lord of the Rings' adaptation.

Case Study #8
Final Fantasy VIII



SquareSoft résumé: Another episode in Square's long running series, and probably the biggest oneplayer adventure that has ever been made.
The plot in brief: Squall, a young man training to be a mercenary, is forced to adjust his feelings towards his companions and acknowledge his growing love for one in particular, during a quest to defeat an evil sorceress…
Why its story works: In a word, quantity. What it may lack in terms of finesse, *FFVIII* more than compensates for with reams of dialogue, lavish CG sequences and a few memorable set pieces. Having the luxury of giving itself hours to introduce and lend flesh to characters, it positively bludgeons players into caring what happens to its protagonists.
Why Hollywood called: In a word: moolah. Anything *Final Fantasy* sells.

TESTSCREEN

The definitive monthly assessment of the world's latest videogames

Crisis zone

Traditionally, walking around Tokyo's Akihabara district around the time of a major release – say, *Biohazard Code: Veronica* – you're likely to find it hard to track down a copy of the game whose hype is on everybody's lips. If it happens to be a massively popular title, even its host console can prove scarce.

So it was rather alarming to wander through Akihabara's streets recently and find that every shop, from the major chains to the smallest back-street vendors, had little trouble in supplying customers with the videogame of their choice, be it *Sega GT: Homologation Special*, *Gran Turismo 2* or *Vagrant Story*. Everything was available in ample quantity. Except, that is, Game Boy Color hardware. Nintendo's portable 8bit technology was nowhere to be seen. As new shipments arrived from the Kyoto game giant, stocks were clearing out in a matter of days.

The truth is that times are tough for the Japanese games industry. A glance at recent weekly sales figures tells all: 4,500 Neo Geo Pockets, 5,000 WonderSwans, 8,000 PlayStations, 19,000 Dreamcasts (boosted by Capcom's latest survival horror epic), and a massive 70,000 Game Boy Colors (still riding the *Pokémon Gold/Silver* tidal wave). From a European perspective, the figures may look healthy – but the Japanese market is used to far stronger sales. And it's been a similar story with software. Only a minute number of titles with a high enough profile have been selling anything near the volume associated with the many successes of the last few years. Everything else, regardless of quality, simply clogs up the shelves.

All this inactivity has had some grave consequences – escalating development costs combined with poor sales having had their effect. Several of Akihabara's stores having closed down and others are downsizing their operations. Japanese software developers have also been feeling the pressure. Human, Gaga Interactive and Data East have keeled over, while other, higher-profile publishers are not performing as well as in their glorious heydays.

Accepted wisdom suggests that Japan's gameplaying public has been watching its pockets, awaiting the release of PlayStation2 in March (despite disappointing attendance at the PlayStation Festival 2000), and that the appearance of the new console will recharge the Japanese industry's economy. **Edge** believes this will happen. After all, the industry can't seriously be heading towards another juddering crash. Can it?





From left: *Gran Turismo 2*, *Vagrant Story* and *Biohazard Code: Veronica* – three titles which just a year ago would have had trouble satisfying demand from hit-seeking Japanese gamers

Every issue, **Edge** evaluates the best, most interesting, hyped, innovative or promising games on a scale of ten, where five naturally represents the middle value. A game receiving a 'seven out of ten', for example, is a very competent title with noticeable flaws but which should still appeal to a considerable range of players. It does, after all, score two points above average and should therefore not be considered as such.

Edge's rating system is fair, progressive and balanced. An average game deserves an average mark – not, as many believe, seven out of ten.

Videogames on the Edge

This month's cutting-edge line-up, courtesy of a handful of PS2 demo discs...



GT2000
(PS2) SCEI
Cars may still not get damaged (apparently US manufacturers don't mind while Europeans do), but this is shaping up to be a fabulous, beautiful racer.



Fantavision
(PS2) SCEI
Splendid fireworking awaits as you carefully set up stunning pyrotechnic sequences and watch your score soar ever higher up the table.



Ridge Racer V
(PS2) Namco
So accessible, so *Ridge*, Namco's next-generation racer's looks may divide opinions, but you can't deny it offers some explosive racing action.



Street Fighter EX3
(PS2) Capcom
More instantly enjoyable than *TTT*, the playable demo **Edge** has in the office keeps luring the crew away from their desks for a bout or five.

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BIOHAZARD CODE: VERONICA



With a game such as this, suspense is everything, which is why you won't find too many explicitly revelatory screenshots on these pages to spoil surprises

It may come as a surprise to learn that *Code: Veronica* outsold *Shenmue* within one week of its release. That's quite a remarkable achievement, but Japan's undying love of Capcom's survival horror franchise should not be underestimated.

For those who still care about narrative, *Veronica* takes place after *Biohazard 2*. Having escaped the explosive outcome in Racoon City, Claire Redfield continues her search for brother Chris, only to be apprehended by Umbrella's minions and placed under arrest on a remote island. The local R&D department soon loses control of its experiments (Umbrella really should consider hiring better scientific staff) and before you know it the complex is littered with the undead. From then on, it's business as usual.

Biohazard's great achievement is that every new instalment proves as engaging as the last, without even offering anything substantially different. It helps that the quality of the series is first rate. It may be said that it's possible to have too much of a good thing, but having just released the umpteenth *Street Fighter* title on PS2, Capcom clearly isn't heeding that advice. And that's good news, because *Veronica* is easily one of the best in the series.

Like *Last Escape* (*Bio 3*), it's not the scariest – there's a distinct lack of the shock value seen in the first two games, but the pace is more frenetic – the game's sections combine with the cut-scenes to deliver a real sense of urgency. This is the closest the series has got to emulating a Hollywood action feature and the result is both refreshing and bold.

Along with *Gun Survivor* (see p75), this also marks the first time the *Bio* games have featured backgrounds rendered on the fly. And while the general graphical blandness of the opening sections may leave you questioning Capcom's decision, later

The pace is frenetic. Game sections combine with cut scenes to deliver a real sense of urgency. **This is the closest the series has got to emulating** a Hollywood action feature





The game isn't overloaded with innovative touches, but in a neat twist the VM unit acts as a health meter while you're wandering around zombie land







Format: **Dreamcast**

Publisher: **Capcom**

Developer: **In-house**

Price: **¥6,800 (£40)**

Release: **Out now (Japan); June (UK)**



As with every previous *Biohazard*, *Veronica* introduces a couple of new faces. Expect more action, too



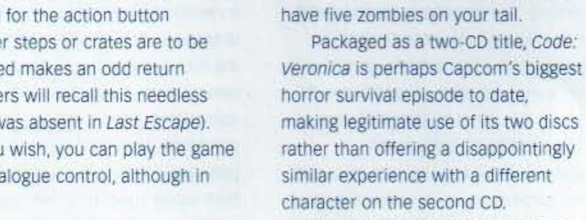




Most cut-scenes use the in-game engine (top), which is capable of beautifully atmospheric scenery (centre). The new dual targeting feature in action (above)

locales more than justify it and make full use of Dreamcast's graphical capabilities to generate some deeply atmospheric settings.

The move to a realtime environment also allows dynamic camera movement, as in *Dino Crisis* and *Silent Hill* before it, which creates distinct gameplay consequences. Even the most finely choreographed set piece cannot compete with the level of tension generated by a camera panning along a corridor as a means of following your character into a new room. It's a genuinely alarming experience, and it's a crime that this concept is so under used.



The most apparent addition here is your character's dual tracking ability, allowing you to target two flesh eaters at once if you're holding two guns. The quick-turn action first seen in *Dino Crisis* is implemented, while the need for the action button whenever steps or crates are to be negotiated makes an odd return (PS owners will recall this needless feature was absent in *Last Escape*).

If you wish, you can play the game using analogue control, although in play **Edge** continually reverted to digital input, finding the former a little woolly and, occasionally, frustratingly ambiguous in its execution of directional instructions. It's hardly the sort of thing you need when you have five zombies on your tail.

Packaged as a two-CD title, *Code: Veronica* is perhaps Capcom's biggest horror survival episode to date, making legitimate use of its two discs rather than offering a disappointingly similar experience with a different character on the second CD.

Refrain from selecting the lowest difficulty level and Capcom's latest should provide several evenings of entertainment, while a fair bundle of bonuses encourages subsequent play. Surprising, menacing and consistently enthralling, this cements the series' reputation as the undisputed genre leader.



Edge rating:

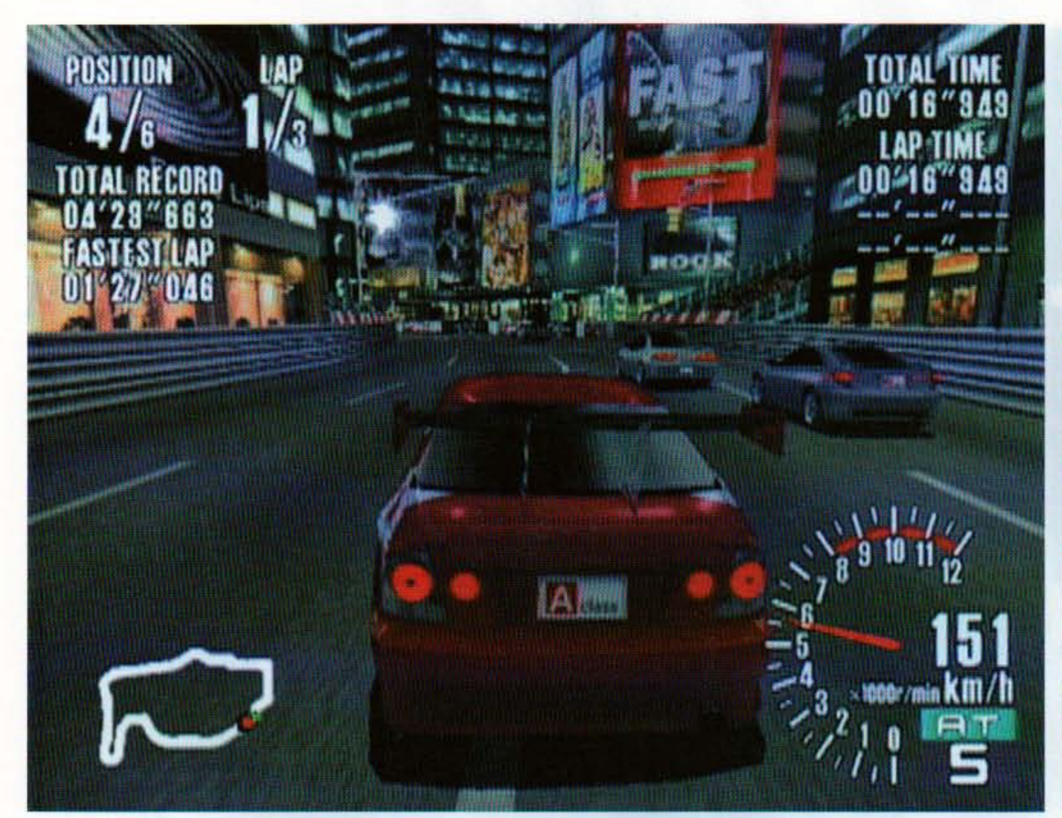
Eight out of ten





Initially it appears as though *Code: Veronica* offers a more limited weapon selection than previous *Biohazards*. Things pick up by disc two, however

SEGA GT HOMOLOGATION SPECIAL









Everything in *Sega GT*'s world is rather angular and flat, particularly track background details. The game does its best to ape *Gran Turismo*, yet its structure proves more restrictive, its circuits are of a poorer design, its tuning options offer less depth, and its dynamics are misconceived. Polyphony will not be losing any sleep



Car models are rather elementary in detail. The selection (Daihatsu, Mazda, Honda, Subaru, Nissan, Suzuki, Toyota, Mitsubishi) is limited by today's standards, too

Sega may wish to disagree at this stage, but this is essentially the company's answer to Sony's *Gran Turismo*. The premise is identical and the structure is shamefully familiar. It offers the same options, comes with a hefty driving manual, and mixes *GT* racers (the game holds the licence to Japan's 1999 *GT* series) with production models that can be tuned. The game even has a wheel shop and the drag racing option which failed to make it into *GT2*.

There's nothing wrong with aiming high, of course, provided you deliver the goods. Yet here the cloning is done with a distinct lack of finesse.

The quickest way to get on the track is by going down the single race menu route. A series of races are split, according to difficulty, into three cups. It clearly demonstrates *Sega GT*'s lack of balance. For instance, for each of the races you're free to choose a vehicle from a predetermined list comprising some surprisingly varied machines. Who, then, will resist picking a *GT*-spec or super sportscar, both vastly superior to the showroom types you'll be racing against, to then turbo into the distance and spend two very lonely laps?

It's a flaw that extinguishes the challenge and ruins what could otherwise have been a tight and compellingly quick race option.

Maybe that explains why the developer saw fit to reward anyone who completes the single race mode with nothing more than an arcade-like congratulatory screen.

But here's always the championship element of the game. After acquiring your driving licences, select a secondhand vehicle within your budget and enter a progressive series of championships. Finishing positions determine the amount of cash earned, which is in turn spent on upgrading your existing race machine or purchasing a new contender. You should know the score by now.

Of the numerous racing options, the most interesting remain the 18 event championships, offering anything from the Pioneer max speed trial and the Bridgestone endurance meeting to the McDonald's cup and the aforementioned drag racing strip.

The most interesting option is the 18 event championships, offering anything from the Pioneer max **speed trial and the Bridgestone endurance meeting to the** McDonald's cup and drag racing strip



The first sign that things are not all they should be: why allow players to select stupidly overpowered machines, robbing the quick race mode of any challenge?

In an interesting move away from the *Gran Turismo* formula, winning various of these competitions rewards you a with set of sponsors who embellish subsequent race winnings – a rather satisfying outcome.

Welcome, too, is the Carrozzeria mode which lets you build a car from scratch. It isn't massively intricate but it does allow you to pick from a selection of engines, power-boosting devices, body type as well as making decisions on engine placement and drive train options. It's an expensive procedure, but provided you've got a formula that suits your driving style it soon pays off. You're free to enter races with your customised creation – though class restrictions still apply.

So where does it all go wrong, you ask? Well, it's simply dull. There's nothing here that successfully transmits the thrill of pushing a race machine on the limit. Cars not only appear to float above circuits, but they rotate on a single axis and refuse to turn convincingly into corners, displaying some of the most extreme understeering characteristics seen among recent racers.

Fitting racing slicks and suspension tweaking may improve matters, but you'd be surprised how subtle the resulting effect is. The brakes are more than a little on the feeble side, while opponent AI is such that you're never under the illusion of racing against anything





In addition to a series of predictable race meetings, the max speed (left) and drag racing options at least represent a move away from the usual offerings



Format: **Dreamcast**

Publisher: **Sega**

Developer: **In-house**

Price: **¥5,800 (£34)**

Release: **Out now (Japan) Autumn (UK)**



Ten reversible tracks plus two drag strips are offered. The twoplayer mode, meanwhile, fails to inject any more excitement into the proceedings (top)

but a particularly unintelligent CPU. Add frustrating collision dynamics, unengaging sound effects and uninspired track design and you suddenly find yourself a long way from *Gran Turismo* country.

The fundamental problem with *Sega GT* is the game's inability to decide whether to stay close to Sega's arcade roots or venture down the simulation route, choosing instead to hover uncomfortably somewhere in between. It certainly has the quantitative equation correctly worked out, but it fails to match it with the necessary quality resulting in the kind of game that will undoubtedly find an ardent, if limited, user base. It certainly won't appease those who've played and adored the *Gran Turismo* series.





Build your own car from a limited list of options in the Carrozzeria mode. It's a nice addition and goes some way towards overcoming the overall disappointment of *SGT*

Edge rating:

Five out of ten

SYPHON FILTER 2







The scenery is especially well rendered and dramatic. Small details like snow moving towards the character and controllable parachute landings are laudable



From icy landscapes to train carriages (top left), hero Logan is rarely left with much time to philosophise about his many, varied actions

The original *Syphon Filter* suffered massively through comparison to the likes of *Tomb Raider* and *Metal Gear Solid*. Poor controls and blocky graphics did nothing to help its cause. Where *Metal Gear Solid* exuded quality from every pore, *Syphon Filter* crucially let itself down in key departments. Being eliminated by a well-placed head shot is one thing, dying because the protagonist couldn't negotiate a two-foot-high hummock is quite another.

Syphon Filter 2 offers an experience relatively free of such glitches. And it boasts many qualities. Eidetic has crafted a warfare game with a great deal of variety – there are 20 missions for the player to complete, and each differs in location and objectives. As in its predecessor, these objectives alter as the mission progresses, maintaining player vigilance and avoiding predictability.

For a simple example, take the first mission. Explosives must be collected to unblock a tunnel which had previously led to freedom. At certain points within the game the player changes character (a growing trend among recent games). Although this doesn't particularly alter the mechanics of the game, it allows for a more diverse range of missions to be put forward.

The environments which must be negotiated are particularly well drawn and atmospheric. Hero Gabe Logan runs, jumps and climbs with a fluidity which this time equals if not betters that of Lara Croft. And unlike the *Tomb Raider* games, the scenery is not so noticeably 'blocky' – different levels and heights of climbable scenery make for a more immersive and believable world. Equally impressive are the comments and shouts heard resounding around your virtual world. Enemies and allies alike communicate to further the suspension of disbelief.

Eidetic has crafted a warfare game with a great deal of variety. Each of the 20 missions differs **in location and objectives. These alter as the mission progresses** – maintaining player vigilance



Aiming skills are crucial. All weapons can target the head if minute tweaks are made, though this crucially gives the enemy time to return fire



Format:	**PS**
Publisher:	**989 Studios**
Developer:	**Eidetic**
Price:	**£35**
Release:	**April 7**



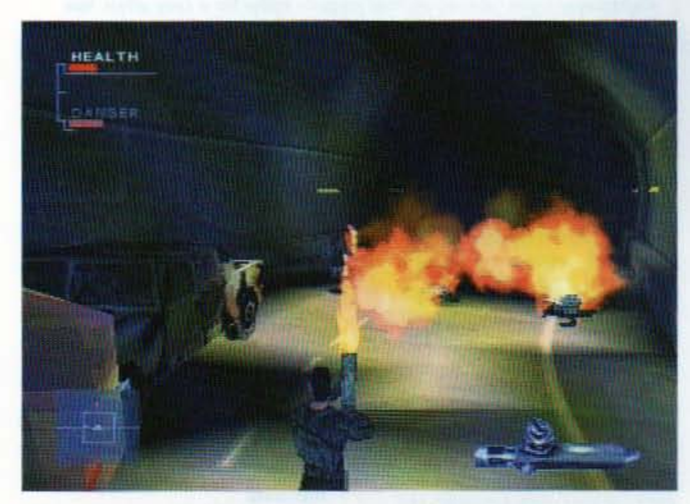
Weapons range from the sublime to the ridiculous, although all have their uses depending upon the given circumstance. Indeed, a large part of the challenge in this title is derived from selecting the most appropriate tool for the job. Enemies wearing flak jackets cannot be eliminated with the usually versatile M16, so a well-placed hand grenade or head shot from a sniper weapon must be used.

The auto-aiming function is slick and the fact that the enemies also pause to reload their weapons is a thoughtful detail. At times, weapons are chosen for you automatically – taking out a few body-armoured adversaries with a fire-spuming fuel pipe serves as a highly satisfying sub-game in its own right.

Stealth also returns, but with differing degrees of success – hiding behind rocks before lobbing grenades at unsuspecting guards is pure good fun, yet at other times no amount of ducking or hiding will prevent the enemy from noticing your position. This leaves the player in some doubt as to whether to take a stealthy or guns-blazing approach.

Too often this depends upon what the programmer wants you to do rather than what you wish to do. In fact, the enemies throughout *Syphon Filter 2* are an inconsistent bunch. Some will hunt you out with the singleminded determination of a Terminator, others happily let you take pot shots at their heads, get angry for a couple of seconds, and then go back to chatting about program loops.

There are a few other disappointments. Menu screens could have been produced on a ZX Spectrum, while the twoplayer deathmatch mode never realises its potential. Yet the tension, subtlety and sheer variety throughout go a good way towards moving this game out from under the shadow cast by Hideo Kojima's masterpiece.



Due to flak jackets and your lack of hardcore weaponry these enemies have to be dispatched with a fire-spewing fuel pipe. What else?

Edge rating:

Seven out of ten







The hand Taser (above) is quiet and effective

MICRO MANIACS

Format: **PlayStation**

Publisher: **Codemasters**

Developer: **In-house**

Price: **£35**

Release: **Out now**





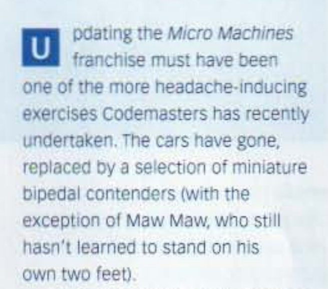


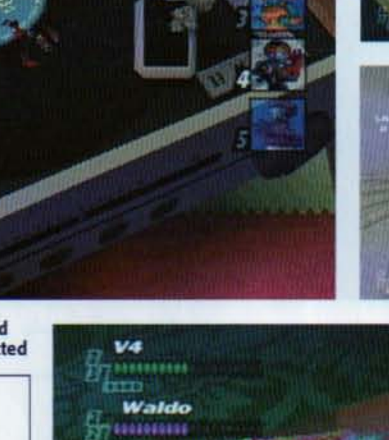
As with all *Micro* titles, the detailed environments are cleverly constructed





Of the few vehicles you get to try out, only jetskiing works satisfactorily (above). Given the game's action-packed nature, the others prove too dull







Eightplayer races (above) on four joypads make for a cosy affair. You have two attack moves, which you can power up via the oneplayer game

Updating the *Micro Machines* franchise must have been one of the more headache-inducing exercises Codemasters has recently undertaken. The cars have gone, replaced by a selection of miniature bipedal contenders (with the exception of Maw Maw, who still hasn't learned to stand on his own two feet).

Your tasks involve undergoing a series of endurance tests to join a mad scientist's vision of an army which will cultivate the world's land before the rest of the population, shrunk to a 1/360th of their original size, joins them. That's what the plot says, but in all frankness the narrative is of no concern to the overall game.

As one of these eight diminutive individuals, you race around various urban environments. If you're playing on your own, the challenge mode has you making your way up a grid of increasingly difficult courses – eight rows of four tracks make up the environment. Provided you finish in the top two, you're free to select a new course from the next available row. Fail to do so three times and it's back to the main menu, where you find more options.

Among others, the Versus mode can be played against the CPU, though it's far more interesting to persuade a few friends to join in the fun. Up to eight can play using a multitap and split joypad controls. Vs Teams simply adds a segregative element to the proceedings.

As with previous *Micro* games, while the oneplayer options soon weakens, the multiplayer aspect is excellent, though if the participants are not properly balanced all of the stopping and starting as players disappear off the screen becomes highly annoying. So choose your opponents with care. You're guaranteed an obscene amount of simplistic fun.

Edge rating:

Seven out of ten







As with all Codemasters titles, progression is rewarded with bonuses. Chances are you'll still spend most of the time in multiplayer, though

BIOHAZARD: GUN SURVIVOR

FEAR EFFECT

Format: **PlayStation**	
Publisher: **Capcom**	
Developer: **In-house**	
Price: **¥5,800 (£35)**	
Release: **Out now (Japan)**	







Tyrant makes an appearance at several points during the game, but he clearly lacks the menace he projected in *Resident Evil 2*, many fans' favourite game

If ever a game were more suited to a rental shelf in BlockBuster than the full-price software section of Electronics Boutique it would be *Bio Hazard: Gun Survivor*. The lack of depth and longevity of many titles has been lamented within these pages – now Capcom's *Resident Evil* offshoot surely takes things too far by allowing players to complete the game on their first attempt. There are only two levels of difficulty: easy and normal (the latter being default), although why easy is included is anybody's guess (the option would be better termed 'extremely casual gamers only').

The ease with which *Bio Hazard: Gun Survivor* can be finished is a crying shame, for there is much to recommend it. The 3D environments are well rendered. Apart from containing many of the now-clichéd locations of other *Resident Evil* games (sewers, underground car parks, offices, alleyways, etc), they do much to draw the player in. Incidental touches are also included, such as telephones that trill out to break the eerie silence, and the occasional decorative object that can be broken when shot. The plot, too, is engaging, and the developer thankfully decided to break the blasting monotony by retaining an adventure element – even though it doesn't go much beyond taking object A to location B.

Capcom has clearly attempted to answer fans' calls to turn *Resident Evil* into a firstperson shooter. At no point should the player complain that any of the locations suffer by comparison to its forebears. But there's the rub. In seeing these places through your 'own' eyes, much of the tension previously generated by those dramatic camera angles disappears.

The creatures which proved so menacing, such as the Hunters and the Lickers, make a return, but they do not instill anywhere near the same amount of fear, and they're relatively easy to kill – two shotgun blasts for the former and three for the latter. And the tedious loading times in between opening and closing doors reduces any chance of your heart rate raising any higher than when taking a morning constitutional.

Weapons react adequately but thought is needed when selecting the best gun for the creature at hand, and haphazard blasting is encouraged by unlimited handgun ammo. Using the Dual Shock controller benefits the player in many ways over the use of a gun peripheral, as turning quickly and running are clumsy with the latter, which rather makes a mockery of the game's subtitle.

Though well received in Japan, western gamers may well lose patience with Capcom for offering another game that seems more of a cash-in than a knockout.

Edge rating:

Five out of ten



Moving and shooting using just the lightgun can prove frustrating



The Hunters take only a couple of shotgun blasts before expiry reduces the tension and fear factor associated with the *Bio Hazard* brand





Though the Lickers look impressive, jerky animation spoils the overall effect. Running away is not an option – they are simply too quick. You must stand your ground and blast

FEAR EFFECT

Format: **PlayStation**

Publisher: **Eidos**

Developer: **Kronos**

Price: **£30**

Release: **Out now**







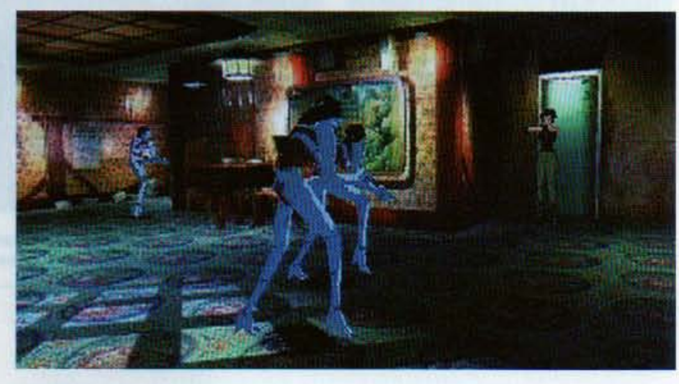




Figuring out the solution to a tricky problem is elating, pulling you deeper into the game. Keep looking for hidden clues in the background



Although the end-of-level boss encounters suffer from poor balance, *Fear Effect* boasts a suspense-loaded plot which allows its manga-style characters to tour a diverse range of scenes. No other game looks like it



As the PlayStation's knees really begin to creak, it's heartening to see new releases as bold as this, an action adventure which looks like no other 32bit videogame to date.

Coming from a background in movie special effects, LA developer Kronos has focused on its artwork skills and with *Fear Effect* has fashioned a game that, visually, is incredibly distinctive from the outset. It's built entirely using prerendered backgrounds, which require shipping on four discs, and the backdrop animations help generate the sense of suspense that an adventure game needs. Overlay these elements with manga-style characters, rendered in 16 colours to allow the characters you play to be the same as those populating the cut scenes, and the effect isn't unlike taking part in an anime movie.

Beginning in a futuristic Hong Kong, a trio of mercenaries are hired to locate the missing daughter of a triad leader. Predictably, all is not what it seems. The lead characters soon find themselves involved in a mystery that takes them through a Hong Kong skyscraper, a zombie village, and a Chinese brothel, before reaching a climax in the pits of hell. It may sound over the top, but thanks to a tight script and carefully managed plotline the result is a fully immersive experience.

Of equal importance is the way the puzzles are integrated into the plot. Rather than opting for an item combination system, which can be obscure to the point of becoming ridiculous, the solutions are worked into the gorgeous backdrops. So if, for example, you need to find a sequence of buttons for a solution, you might find it painted on a wall somewhere, or in a neon display flickering outside, or maybe even playing on a television set in the background. This means that you avoid the need to ferret through your inventory where you might find yourself mixing the ginger cat with the rusty cog and the trifle, or some such ludicrous combination which you wouldn't naturally consider.

Although *Fear Effect* looks great, there are serious gameplay faults that undermine the experience. Fundamentally, the balance between puzzle solving and beating the end-of-level bosses is extremely flawed. And the game's clumsy control system makes the boss encounters absurdly difficult – you actually come to dread the arrival of the next big bad guy, which hampers the effectiveness of the storyline.

In such a beautifully cinematic game, featuring clever plotting and scripting, such deficiencies are even more offensive.



Highly cinematic, the effects, camerawork and action sequences are excellent and give more than a nod to the action movies of John Woo

Edge rating:

Six out of ten

The trials of a start-up developer: part 21

After co-founding Lionhead Studios with Peter Molyneux, Demis Hassabis set up his own development house, Elixir Studios. He has squeezed in one more instalment of his exclusive diary... but now crunch time on *Republic: The Revolution* beckons

There goes 2000

The start of this year has been fraught even by our standards. I think I had one day off in five weeks. And that one was much to everyone's horror. The recent progress is very pleasing and I feel that we're really getting into the groove. The living city is now working properly and it's populated by people walking around doing their daily routines. I'm delighted with the pathfinding; people change direction smoothly to avoid each other when they meet in the streets without that ugly mechanical turning-through-90-degrees stuff you see in many games. They actually look like they're avoiding people naturally. Motion capturing everything has really helped with this.

No matter how meticulous your preparation, always expect a hardware failure at the most inopportune moment. Predictably, on the day of our latest milestone, our demo machine decided it didn't like DirectX very much so we had to take two PCs down to Eidos. We went up to the boardroom and set everything up with Herve, our producer, and then gave him a quick demo. He seemed happy, so we turned it off and waited for the others to join us. Everyone else came in and I started the demo. Nothing. I tried the second PC. Nothing. I spent half an hour trying to get both working. Everyone sat tapping their fingers. Needless to say, you don't keep people like this waiting. Just as bands famously throw TVs out of hotel windows, I briefly considered instituting the games industry equivalent by sending my demo machine to visit Wimbledon High Street, via five storeys and a large window. Everyone remained very patient. All the same, I was hugely relieved that Herve had actually been there to see it working before. Eventually victory was achieved. This wasn't exactly ideal preparation. Fortunately we had made a huge amount of progress with the game. We've entered a very exciting period of development that involves deciding on the actions that will go into the game. We're working on a set of actions that will provide the backbone to the game and this will be finalised by E3. We can then cram as many actions in as possible, safe in the knowledge that we already have the core game in place.

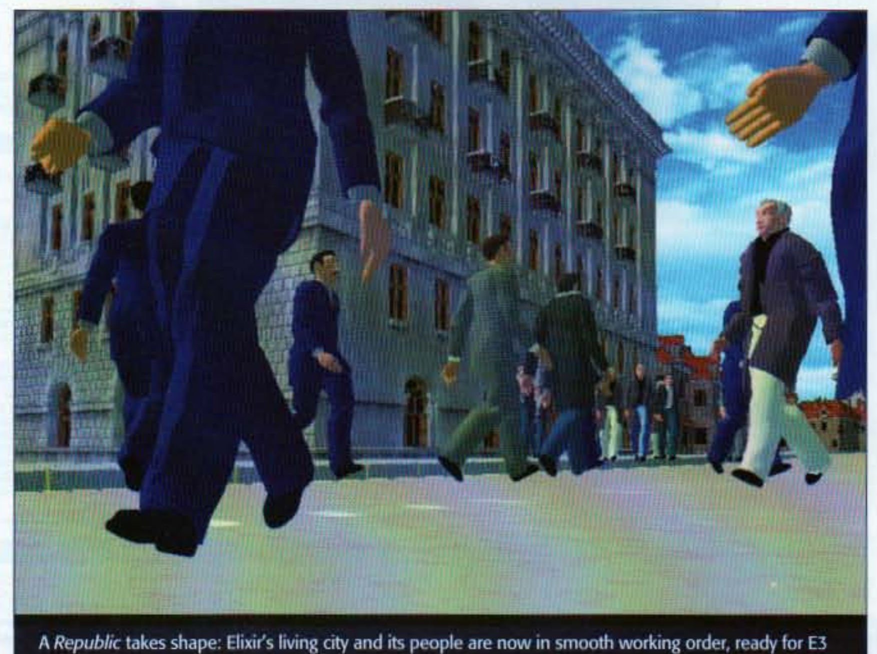
I try hard to make designing at Elixir a collaborative process and we're having lunchtime brainstorming sessions to which everyone is invited. With a team full of gamers we'd be mad not to harness this talent and it's worked brilliantly. Not only does everyone in the team feel involved in the design but they've also come up with great ideas. This week, we've been working on information gathering actions. My personal favourite was Sandy's suggestion for an action called Grill Prostitute, which we thought sounded like something you'd order in a dodgy restaurant on Bangkok's Pat Pong Road.

Planescape Torment has caused much excitement in the RPG faction in the office, who seem to be growing in number at an alarming rate. The number of fevered AD&D discussions have risen dramatically and some of my best programmers have spent days exercised by pressing questions. Please, can someone put them out of their misery: iron rations or standard rations – which are best? I've discovered that Colin, our head of art, is in fact a 15th Level Magic User, a skill earned during his live roleplaying days down Chistlehurst caves. I shall be borrowing his Anorak of Protection to restore order to the office.

'I'm delighted with the pathfinding; people change direction smoothly to avoid each other when they meet in the streets without that ugly mechanical turning-through-90-degrees stuff you see in many games'

A couple more people have joined us. Sandy Sammarco is our new level designer. A fanatical Angband player, he also enjoys talking to his plasma ball, to which he is devoted. They share a room in Northampton and are looking to move to a semi-detached sometime soon. No children as yet. Duncan Jones joins us to work as cameraman, a role we've created specifically for *Republic: The Revolution*. To my knowledge, this is a new role in the industry and one that I hope will become more prevalent. He recently left film school and makes music videos. His expertise will, I hope, allow us to give the game a cinematic ambience. He's taken to wearing a Soviet Naval trench coat and matching beret, which I've chosen to interpret as a sign of his dedication to the game, rather then a dubious statement of intent.

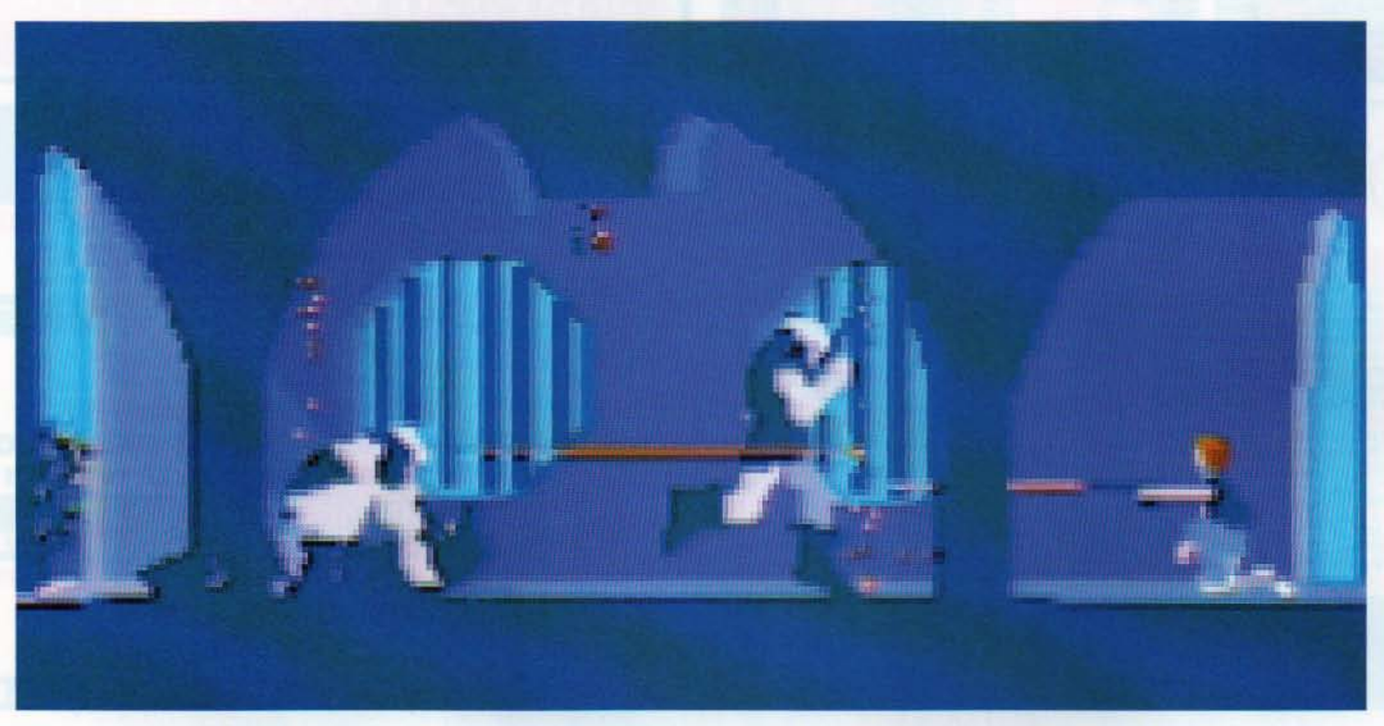
For us, at least, the year 2000 is drawing to a close – with E3 on the horizon and a projected release date of Christmas, crunch time is upon us. I'm having to cut back on all non-essential activities such as friends, free time, sleep and diaries. Sadly, this means that this will be the last diary for the next few months. I hope to be able to continue it after E3, but until then, all there is to say is thank you for reading the diary and I hope you've enjoyed it as much as I've enjoyed writing it.



A *Republic* takes shape: Elixir's living city and its people are now in smooth working order, ready for E3

OUT OF THIS WORLD

As *Fear Effect* (see p76) brings a new graphical style to the PlayStation, **Edge** looks back on a title that did the same to the 16bit scene. Rarely has the combination of head-scratching and screen-punching been as compulsive as it was here

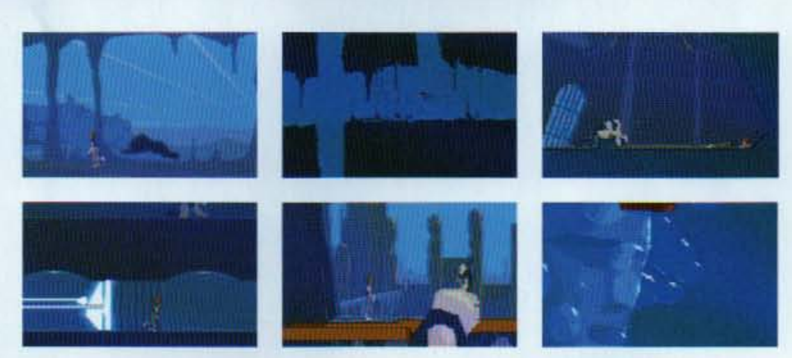


Blasting was a frantic affair at times. Keeping the finger down on the fire button for a short time would create a shield to offer a limited amount of protection, but the more intelligent enemies countered this approach by creating their own shields and poking their gun through yours – a seriously panicky predicament

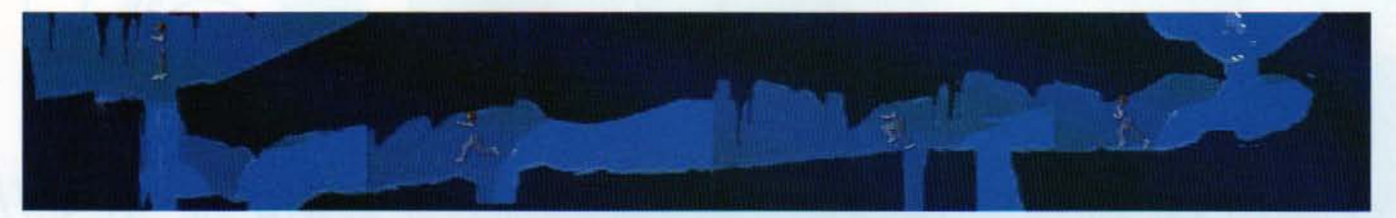
Out Of This World – or *Another World* as it will be known to those who played it in its computer guise – is no doubt fondly remembered for its genuinely challenging problems which put the modern lever-pulling antics of Lara Croft to shame. Yes, this game was developed in a time when progress required imagination and a leap of faith. Literally, at certain points.

The frantic escape from a burst dam showed off *OOTW*'s design flair, as did the clever elimination of an enemy on the level below by shooting down a metal globe which showed his reflection. Equally laudable was the use of a superweapon which offered single fire, shield and supercharge modes.

Not so fondly remembered are the hundreds of death scenes players had to suffer in order to progress. Such was its toughness, in fact, that some segments of the game seemed to offer the gameplay equivalent of guiding a metal hoop around a particularly contorted, electrically charged piece of wire. Frustrations that would not be tolerated today, of course.



The variety of predicaments that hero Conrad found himself in were one of *Out of This World*'s delights – the need to see what lay around the next corner kept players coming back for more. Beautiful realtime-rendered cut-scenes broke new ground (above right)



Traversing the game's environments tested the patience of even the most tolerant – making these pixel-perfect jumps was tricky first attempt, crushing by the 53rd

Publisher: Various | Release: Various | Developer: Amazing Studio | Format: Various

EDGEVIEW

The videogames world never stands still, riding the breaking wave of advancing technology. In this regular column Edge puts the industry's progress in perspective with a look at yesteryear's headlines: five years ago this month



Edge issue 18, March 1995



E20 spoke to Nolan Bushnell, a man honoured (erroneously) as the father of videogaming

The videogame industry is packed to bursting with fascinating facts, but consider this one: when **Edge** met up with Amazing Studio to preview *Heart Of Darkness* in April 1995, the company had already been working on the title for three years; it took another four years to make it to market. Quite a feat for a below-par platformer decorated with FMV trimmings.

But that was just the cover story of **E**20. Inside, more speculation was gathering concerning Trip Hawkins' 3DO successor, M2, which was reported to be capable of generating a jaw-dropping 700,000 polygons per second. (It seemed for a while that the unit could muster as many rumours per issue, too.)

Meanwhile, in another news story, Atari's Jaguar CD add-on promised to bring the delights of *Jack Nicklaus' Cyber Golf* and Readysoft's *Dragon's Lair* to lovers of the format, which no doubt ensured they slept easier at night.

PlayStation game creation and the difficulties facing the European dev scene accounted for **E**20's features, while a massive four titles weighed in for review. But at least Nolan 'Not Actually The Father Of Videogaming' Bushnell got a look in elsewhere.









Clockwise from top left: Nintendo's early 100-megabit game limit creates a stir on the 'Ultra 64' dev scene; the trusty Edge screwdriver gets another airing; PC *Heart Of Darkness*; 'Ultra 64'-powered coin-op *Killer Instinct*

Did they really say that?

Nolan Bushnell: 'The 'she's' represent a very interesting opportunity for all of us. It turns out that I think I've actually figured it out.' Female gamers are still waiting, Nolan

Did Edge really say that?

'Those involved with the [Heart Of Darkness] project do seem genuinely enthusiastic, to a degree unusual even in the excitable games community. Having seen it, **Edge** can understand why.' Oh, such unfailing foresight

Testscreens (and ratings)

Panzer Dragoon (Saturn; 6/10), *Lost Eden* (PC; 5/10), *Heretic* (PC; 8/10), *Killer Instinct* (coin-op; 8/10)

PIXELPERFECT

Every gamer has occasional moments of sparkling excitement, be it the first time *Speedball* booted up, or completing *Sabrewulf*. Here, Gary Liddon, managing director of Climax Fareham, recalls Taito's deceptively deep game of spheres

When I was young, when I was even stupider than I am now, an amazing spasm of slackness sat me down, booted the C64 and started me playing *Bubble Bobble* I didn't get up again for four months.

Photorealistic 2D was the Holy Grail but *Bubble Bobble* took the audacious step of looking rubbish. Unlike its smooth-scrolling, million-sprite, 1024-shades-of-grey peers, *Bubble Bobble* played like a dream.

Controlling Bub or Bob, two small, mucous-bubble-blowing dinosaurs, traversing 100 screens of excellently paced mayhem was the end goal. Each screen was a masterful concoction of a few platforms and eight enemies. To win, simply encase your foes in a bubble and then pop that bubble to kill 'em. Easy peasy? Not really, squire. Simple rules for bubble-to-bubble interaction, power-ups and mapped bubble-affecting airflows combined to make an incredibly subtle and fun game.

It amazed me how a few simple elements of almost remedial behaviour could interact to produce such rich and complex systems. I rethought and junked earlier conceits about AI and saw again in a new light other games I loved such as *Boulderdash* and *Super Mario Bros*. Despite this magic mix being much more than enough, the twoplayer game shined brightest. Fifty minutes of intense concentration and cooperation got you through to the end boss. After bubbling up to the big bottle-hurling brute all brotherly love dissipated into an attrition-fuelled war to see who could pop the final bubble for ONE MILLION POINTS (to be chortled in a Dr Evil manner). I haven't enough words to tell you about the smörgåsbord of sprite sweets, Baron Von Blubba, or 20-level skip parasols but take my word for it: *Bubble Bobble* amazed then and still does today, and I know 'cos I played it yesterday.





Gary Liddon and his bubble-blowing fave



One in the eye for Sega

Japan: Sega has made clear its plans to use its new Dreameye device as a weapon to inject impetus into its heavily criticised Dreamcast Internet service. The Dreameye – described by Sega as 'the world's first Internet digital video camera' – is capable of storing approximately 65 seconds of footage for use in 'video mails', and will make its Japanese debut in June.

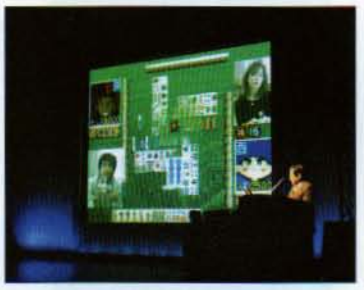
Sega's Japanese Dreamcast Web site has suffered from unmet promises and a barrage of complaints ever since its launch. Now a new Web service will be launched by ISAO Inc, a new CSK branch, to make use of and expand the capabilities of Dreameye. The birth of the unit is being heralded by Sega as transforming today's TV game genres and network comms via the written word and voice into an entirely new world of network entertainment and visual live communities.

Sound is recorded via a helmet mic, for hands-free use, and uses broadband communication. This will allow users to call others and share personal voice and video mail and photos in real time. Sega is also promising a realtime direct telephone number dialling video chat (TV telephone). At this year's Milia conference a demo was performed with Sega president Shoichiro Irimajiri – but its performance showed images that were neither smooth nor especially clear.

A battery pack can also be fitted to allow the Dreameye unit to be mobile. And though few games will be compatible, Sega says it will be possible to transfer images of human faces onto game characters. You may have heard this somewhere before.

ISOA is also planning a large optical fibre network linking all Sega's Gigo and Joypolis arcade centres in Japan. This bold move will mean that players can not only play against one other within the arcade but against rivals in other arcades. Plans are also being developed to link Japanese Dreamcasts with arcade centres next year.











At the event, a Dreameye conference call with Irimajiri-san in Milia was conducted (above). A presentation also offered other uses for the unit





Along with Dreameye, Sega also announced two other new Dreamcast peripherals at the event – an MP3 player and a karaoke mic, which will work with a dedicated ISAO service





The Dreameye hardware is as cute as other Dreamcast peripherals from Sega. It can be used separately from the console through the use of an optional blue battery pack





Sega keeps Swatch over cyberspace

Japan: As official cyberspace timer (which is measured in Swatch beats), Swatch is to bring its Beat Access technology to Sega. The collaboration will mean that Dreamcast users can share the same time over the Internet and meet at a precise time on compatible games.

They will also be able to access home pages quickly using a Swatch watch with a special extension. There are two models: one is inserted in the controller as a PuruPuru Pack, while the second sits on the desk.

The third version of Dreamcast passport software will include the Swatch technology and allow the watch to send and receive information. In the future, Swatch wants to develop several models, including one that is compatible with Sega's Joypolis arcades. In this instance users will not have to use cash or tokens because credit will be stored on the watch. Similarly, there are plans to make the stores inside Sega's theme parks compatible with the unit. The system is set to kick off in April and will cost between ¥15,000 and ¥20,000 (£85-£115).









Japan communicates with Switzerland via a Swatch-Dreamcast wireless coupling (above). In addition to its DC-compatible watches, Swatch has designed a special-edition console (top). The watches talk to DCs via one of two types of interface unit (far left)

Long distance Airplay

UK: Long-sighted people will welcome Airplay's first wireless controller for use with PlayStation, PS2 and Nuon. Though not compulsory, the controller lets players compete from a full 25 feet away from the console without message interference.

It also features programmable buttons, quad triggers and an impressive standard AA battery life of 50 hours. Unfortunately, the peripheral offers only an analogue joystick in its Nuon guise. But for PlayStation owners, these devices are compatible with current Multitap technology, boasting eightplayer capability.







Tunes from the Tomb

UK: Nathan McCree and Matt Kemp, the composers responsible for the musical scores of the *Tomb Raider* games, are locked in negotiations with Paramount Studios in their bid for the contract for the forthcoming movie score. Shooting on the film begins in three months and it should hit cinema screens before Christmas 2001.

McCree, who founded Meode Productions in July 1998 after leaving Core Design, is confident of securing the deal. "I think Paramount recognises that the quality of the music is one of the things that has helped establish the huge following for *Tomb Raider*," he claims. "The studio wants to ensure that fans who see the movie enjoy the same sort of experience."

None of the original music will feature in the film, but the score will keep that blend of baroque and modern which made the first game so distinctive. As a double bonus, Meode is to release a CD of its most important work, including those haunting classics which complemented Lara's first adventures.





Paramount made a big noise when it signed up *Tomb Raider* (above), and it may retain authenticity by bringing Nathan McCree (right) on board



TV Eyes Spy on you



UK: Interactive television in the home is being likened to behavioural experiments conducted on rats by BF Skinner. While consumers are enticed by the prospect of home shopping and games, it is alleged that broadcasters are busy selling their new-found power to monitor people in the home.

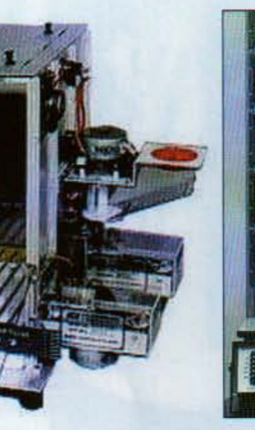
"I can tell you loads about Brighton," boasts one database analyst. "Changing channels, selecting certain programmes, viewing browsing through interactive sites, all that kind of stuff we can track. Every click we can track."

David Burke, editor of *White Dot*, a publication opposed to television viewing, warns that 'telegraphics' will be used not only to record information but feed information to the viewer in an attempt to stimulate particular responses.

"Every time I thought of some new way interactive TV could work to control viewer behaviour, I called up the companies involved and found they were already working on it," he says. *White Dot* and Privacy International both warn that in Britain the collection of such information is not illegal. They have called for a boycott of interactive television.

Datamonitor, a market analysis group, has released figures which strongly suggest interactive TV is set to increase dramatically, predicting that by 2003 the digital home market will be worth $37bn, with one in five households having access to such services. Visit www.spyinteractive.com for more on Spy TV.

Is the television being turned into a Skinner box? The next time you're fed a series of options, think about who is pressing whose buttons





DataStream



Sega's estimated consolidated net loss for the year 1999 to 2000: **¥44.9bn**
Increase over its prior forecast of a ¥19.8bn loss: **127 per cent**
Number of consecutive years Sega has been in the red: **three**
Sega's revised forecast for domestic sales of Dreamcast in the September-March half-year: **600,000 units**
Sega's original estimate: **1.1m**
Eidos' nine-month loss before tax to December: **£11m**
Eidos' pre-tax profit a year ago: **£36.2m**
Number of Wall Street research brokers recommending Eidos as a strong buy: **four out of five**
Eidos' year-on-year decrease in turnover for the three quarters to December: **16 per cent**
Amount spent on online entertainment activities by European consumers in 1998: **$300m**
Amount expected to be spent in 2003: **$8bn**
Number of copies of *The Sims* (above) sold during the three weeks after release: **215,000**
Number of Gekko chips IBM has produced for Nintendo's Dolphin system: **2m**
Total surface area of Milia 2000 event in Cannes: **7,254 square metres**
Number of journalists in attendance: **673**
Number of participating companies: **2,513**

Discovered: world's first game patch

UK: Edge reader Stephen Knott kindly makes a contribution to this month's Out There by supplying what he believes to be the videogame world's first 'game patch' – in reality a hastily photocopied sheet of paper Activision included with its Atari VCS conversion of *Ghostbusters*. Solid-state software may still be in use today (praise be for plug-and-play *GoldenEye*), but softcos just don't supply customer support like this any more.

IMPORTANT!!!

INFORMATION FOR PLAYING GHOSTBUSTERS

PLEASE FOLLOW THIS PROCEDURE:-

When you are slimed and you have to go back to Headquarters (flashing green block) take your Ghostbuster symbol straight back and place it over the flashing green block. Now move your joystick in the down position and then press the firing button. This is the correct procedure and the game will continue.

DO NOT press the firing button while green block is flashing or the game will disappear.

DO NOT press the firing button until you have moved the Ghostbusters symbol over the flashing block and you are holding the joystick in the down position.

ENJOY GHOSTBUSTERS

P.S. PLEASE USE THESE INSTRUCTIONS IN CONJUNCTION WITH ORIGINAL INSTRUCTIONS.

The 'patch' in all its photocopied, monochrome glory. Does anyone know of any earlier examples?







Broadcast
The Noise Made By People
Warp

Residents of Sheffield's home for diseased electronica have the audacity of attempting a recording using real instruments. Broadcast timidly pluck their echo-laden guitars and tinkle their primitive synths, but their sound, though unashamedly melodic, has more in common with Aphex or Boards Of Canada than Oasis. Disconcerting, in the manner of '70s infomercials about the dangers of nuclear power, but retaining a sleek optimism.

The Delgados
The Great Eastern
Chemikal Underground

The Delgados are traditionally more feted for their vision in signing Mogwai and Arab Strap to this, their own Glasgow label, than for their own affable lo-fi indie pop, but this third album should overturn perceptions. Woozy strings and brass accompanies their determined, intricate melodies, which stumble across a new strain of folk music. Vocals remain fey, but delicate not feeble. 'Songs sung out of key/remind me that I'm free,' sings Alun Woodward on 'Aye Today' referring to his vague grasp of tonality, which is actually an asset on a record of rare, glorious intimacy.

Fila Brazillia
Brazilification
Kudos Records

An aversion to media attention has seen this dance remix duo remain firmly rooted to the underground scene, despite six album releases featuring more than 60 tracks from a disparate artist selection. Here, they reconcile 18 of their best remixes on a tight, relentlessly listenable two-CD package. From Radiohead's masterfully retouched 'Climbing Up The Walls' to Moloko's 'Lotus Eaters' or Lamb's 'Cotton Wool' remix, the boys rarely err.



Author: **Marc Saltzman**
Publisher: **Bradygames**
ISBN: **1566869048**

SECRETS OF THE SAGES

First things first: there are no secrets here. Instead, there are interviews with around 100 industry insiders from Peter Molyneux, creator of *Black & White*, to Nintendo's Shigeru Miyamoto, and Jay Stelly, senior software engineer at Valve Software, creator of *Half-Life*. With scores of colleagues, they join Marc Saltzman to offer commentary on everything from design to programming, artificial intelligence, art, animation, testing and marketing.

Saltzman has compiled the tenets of game design that every self-respecting developer and producer worth their salt should know. But its title is misleading. If you're a fledgling games designer on the doorstep of the industry, the book will give you a feel of what makes some industry bigwigs tick, but it spells out a lot of plain common sense.

It's good to be reminded that Shigeru Miyamoto believed that "making games fun" should be a designer's prime objective. But it's not going to help you if you're stuck in a creative rut. As a history and anatomy of the game design industry it does well, offering a veritable Who's Who of establishment characters. But this tome is not one you'll rush to pick up again once digested.



Author: **Justina Robson**
Publisher: **Macmillan**
ISBN: **0330375660**

SILVER SCREEN

Robson is the new voice of cyberpunk. She standing tall on the shoulders of giants like William Gibson and Neil Stephenson with this startling debut. Delivering more than the usual fare of avatars and virtual worlds, it explores human consciousness and asks whether combined human computer intelligence is the next stage in man's evolution.

Genius hacker Roy Croft believes so. He spends his life madly and intimately connected to machines, until his sudden death while deep in commune with the most advanced artificial intelligence in existence – 901. His death sparks events that challenge heroine O'Connell's belief in artificial intelligence and make her question the boundaries between man and machine. His closest friend and colleague and with a 'memory like a file server', she devotes her waking hours after his death to 901.

The plot twists nimbly from conspiracy theory to mad game, trying to keep its sense of humour while going beyond mundane technophilia. It may not be as seminal as Gibson's 'Neuromancer' but Robson establishes a new default in the genre. Machines are intelligent, now it's up to us to decide what that's going to mean. Expect a film adaptation to follow.



INTERNET
Site: Net Baby
URL: www.netbaby.com

Cult toy weirdness is spreading. You will be forgiven for thinking that Netbaby is Japanese. It certainly has all the hallmarks of the culture that produced both Pokémon and Digimon – simple design, big head, completely useless. Yet this creature comes from the mind of a Swede. Consult the Netbaby Web site and you can meet Digger (pictured right) and all his friends. They include Slacker, Ninja Girl and Copernicus – an outcast artichoke. What else? Digger will set you back $35 and 20 years.



VIEWPOINT

EXPRESS YOURSELF IN **EDGE** – WRITE TO: LETTERS, **EDGE**, 30 MONMOUTH STREET, BATH BA1 2BW (email: edge@futurenet.co.uk)

I agree in part to Stefan Mytilineous' claims (Viewpoint, **E**81) regarding extended development moving from PSX to PSY. The biggest change will be the size of the project. A lot of ideas have previously been left out of games because of processor restrictions, but these ideas may soon be incorporated. Details such as water being absorbed by clothing – how much water will it take for those clothes to cling to the body, and how long will it take to dry? The more small detail there is, the more loose ends there are to tie up.

Greater processing power creates greater challenges. SquareSoft and Namco will doubtless double their development teams to squeeze all the potential out of the new hardware. The difficulty will be faced by smaller coders deciding how much to invest. The extra skills needed to code for PSY are not beyond technical limits, but development teams must expand, with higher costs and risks.

Kay Muhnor, via email

People have been complaining lately about a lack of interesting arguments bar the 'my computer's better than yours' debate. So how about this: does it not piss everyone else off, that if you want the best racing game around you have to buy a PlayStation (for *GT2*). If you want the best platform/adventure game you have to buy an N64 (for *Mario/Zelda*). If you want the best arcade games you have to buy a Dreamcast (for *Crazy Taxi*, etc). And finally, if you want the best multiplayer experiences, you have to buy a PC. Does this seem unfair to anybody else? It agitates me that since there are a lot more hardware companies in the market these days, you have to buy at least two machines just to be able to play good games from different genres. What happened to the good old days of a simple Nintendo vs Sega?

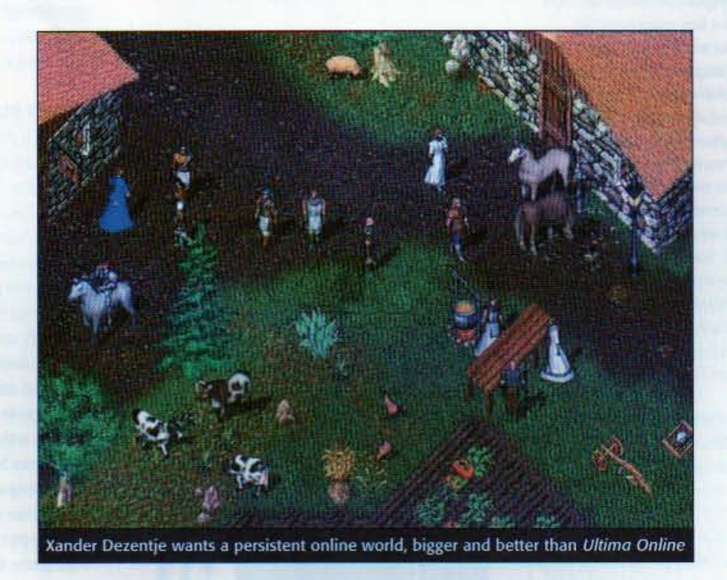
Tamer, via email

But spare a thought for how much worse the situation was when Dragon 32s, VIC-20s, C64s, BBCs, TI-99/4As, Acorn Electrons, Lynxes, Orics, Atari 800s, and ZX Spectrums roamed the earth.

I read with interest the Prescreen Focus on *Speedball 2100* (E82). Just as I had concluded after visiting Bitmap Bros Web site, the long-awaited title should provide one of the definitive gaming fixes of the year.

I have to agree with Mike Montgomery with regard to the *FIFA* (insert year here) fixation with motion-captured players replete with nausea-inducing camera changes. However, what can be wrong with giving gamers the option to choose their own camera angles, flight-sim style? The choice should be up to the end user. Imagine if everyone was forced to listen to their music on one set piece of hardware – where's the fun in that? If user-selectable cameras is a gameplay issue the Bitmap Bros could always adopt arcade/sim modes *à la GT2* and have the best of both worlds. Personally I found the tennis-ball eye shift of *FIFA* to be annoying, but why not give the player the power to toggle between cameras centred on team members as they move?

James Pickering, via email



Xander Dezentje wants a persistent online world, bigger and better than *Ultima Online*

'Games dealing with emotions will either be the stuff of dreams or become a **niche market. The beer-swilling masses** will be content watching Lara's arse sculpted in a **million polys'**

How pleased was I when in your Retroview section (E82) you printed as you say the game that came *years* before Tamagotchi (*Little Computer Person*). Well now that you have printed that, maybe you or any one of your readers can answer a question that I have wanted to be answered in the 10 or so years since the title's release.

What on earth did he do in that top room?

Yep, that's right, it's a simple question, but one that I *need* answered. (To jog your memory, it's the room next door to the piano – which I assumed to be the attic. He went in there an awful lot and I remember him staying in there for hours on end when he was sad.)

So it's answers-on-a-postcard time, or it's a case of dig up the programmer and find out, because I'm dying to know.

Chris Lock, via email

It was his... 'special' room. Do any readers know the specifics?

Imagine a persistent, ever-growing online world. A world with star-travelling capability. In this world you could play an RPG much like *Ultima Online* and live a life you choose. You could go into space and become a freelancer like in *Privateer*, or be a regular guy with a job who goes down the pub. You might play some pool or watch *Unreal Tournament* on the Tube, betting on the outcome with your fellow drinkers. You could even be

a war correspondent, covering a skirmish between GDI and NOD – which is being fought out by two people playing *Tiberian Sun* online.

This online world could be a free-for-all developers' playground. EA could give *FIFA 2000* online compatibility with this world. Gamers who buy this game could play online against each other. Gamers who don't buy *FIFA*, but buy the online world, could attend matches (as hooligans if they like, but they could be arrested), watch it on TV in their virtual apartments, even bet on the outcome. Racing games, deathmatches, wars (CNN on TV), RPGs (they can take place on this world or the worlds surrounding it) and several more genres could fit in this persistent online universe, where Lara Croft lives in her mansion, where Duke Nukem sits in a bar drinking beer.

Wouldn't it be fun? Maybe Elixir Studios' infinite poly engine will make it possible. Or, if nothing else, it can at least populate it with infinite monkeys.

Xander Dezentje,
via email

You should get a job in game design. (And then start beating your head against a wall when it becomes clear just how taxing realising a dream such as this would be).

Your magazine is the best when it comes to a sober view on computer games. However, I found your article 'Development Hell' (**E**81) was spoilt slightly by the odd choice of drawings on page 65. I found it off-putting. I sincerely hope the best days of **Edge** are not numbered.

David Bal,
via email

You know, it's becoming increasingly difficult to tell whether some of you lot are joking or not.

Games that include emotional content are seen as the way forward by many, but I can't help thinking nothing will come of this idea. Most console owners are male teenagers through to male 20-somethings. How many of them read books or watch films which deal with love or friendship? How many are likely to purchase a game with these themes? And where are the software houses that can produce such games? There haven't been any games yet with these themes. Even 'Bambi' has more emotion than any 2D game. How will companies let the player express an emotion to a computer-generated character? Press triangle to cry, press square to smile?

I predict that games dealing with emotions on a level with films or books will either be the stuff of dreams or become a niche market, such as Japanese mecha war games. The bird-pulling, beer-swilling, football-loving masses will be content with watching Lara's digital arse sculpted in a million polygons, bumping into things in her uniquely unresponsive fashion. That's love.

L Piper,
via email

One thing that people have forgotten to take into account concerning the new console war is how the graphics look. After seeing PlayStation2 screenshots, seeing it being played on TV and speaking to someone who's played on the machine, I am not impressed. The technology inside is probably revolutionary but how effectively is it being used to tempt users away from the competition?

The main pull of any new console is how advanced it is. This is normally demonstrated by its graphics. But with PS2 they don't look much better than the latest Dreamcast offerings. The PS2 is supposedly offering graphics far above that of any competitor. It has not proved this. Are graphics finally reaching their pinnacle? How much better can Dolphin look over PS2? Will anyone care?

Michael Bell,
via email

'The main pull of a console is how advanced it looks – normally **demonstrated by graphics. But PS2's don't** look much better than Dreamcast. **Are graphics** reaching their **pinnacle?'**

From a development perspective, PlayStation2 is a convoluted beast, and its architecture simply serves as a litmus test for the skill of codeshops creating software on it.

So **Edge** thinks Dreamcast only deserves a place under a hardcore gamer's TV (Viewpoint **E**81). Wrong. The Dreamcast has one big ace – the modem. Out of the box and on to the Internet in ten minutes. That's a big pull. And the price is bound to drop this year. DVD lives in the land of the tech-head but the Internet is mass market. While Sony thinks about HDTV and broadband, Sega sees VGA monitors and Zip drives. How many homes in the UK will have HDTV or broadband phone lines in 2001? Some weeks my girlfriend switches the Dreamcast on more than me, to play games, but mainly to go on the Internet and send emails. The Dreamcast will have a place under a lot more than hardcore gamers' TVs.

Tim Surman,
via email

Let's see what another, rather more committed DC owner thinks...

Having owned a Dreamcast since day one of its UK release date I have been pleasantly pleased with its progress, aside from the frustrating wait for more Japanese software to get a PAL translation (where the hell is *King Of Fighters: Dream Match '99*?!). Being a games enthusiast for the last ten years I believe the console has definitely delivered the goods, games that cater for those who helped make the business the entertainment giant it is today – ie, the hardcore gamers, as you like to label them.

Sega, with the likes of Capcom, Namco and SNK, is outputting some of the finest next generation software out there. But do you know what really hurts? It's the fact that only us, the hardcore gamers, can truly appreciate the quality of titles out on the system. I mean, how many people over here or in the US are going to choose a Dreamcast to sample the splendours of such software as the *Shenmue* series, *Eternal Arcadia*, *Virtual On*, *Grandia 2* or *SNK Vs Capcom* after the release of PlayStation2? Hardly enough to save the

console from what I believe to be an inevitable death following the release of Sony's machine on these shores! There just doesn't seem to be a market for these kinds of games in the west, and why the hell not?!

Dreamcast has stacks of potential. So far it has come up with some absolutely stunning titles. Perhaps just as important is the fact that this platform has a quality only one other company can boast – character. *Sonic*, *Mario* and co all give their systems a distinct look and feel. PlayStation and its successor cannot even hope to achieve that kind of iconic status.

Predictably, PlayStation2 will be host to countless versions of EA's *FIFA* series and Core's *Tomb Raiders* filling in the void between the latest offerings from Square and Namco. Ironically this ultimately shallow, not to mention unbearably tacky, marketing approach will conquer all in the end. Despite the tremendous efforts made by Sega and Nintendo to produce quality to simply die for, they've already lost.

I'm currently in university studying a programming-based course. I hope to be a part of the games industry in the near future and can only hope and pray that the gaming community in the west will re-embrace the kind of hardcore gaming Sega and Nintendo are still offering.

Kamil Haroon,
London

Reading Stefan Mytilineos' letter in **E**81, I haven't laughed so much in ages. I have owned just about every console/computer since the Spectrum 48K. People who berate the so-called casual gamer should get another hobby. Games are not a matter of life or death! It doesn't matter if a game is aimed at the mass market and has gigabucks of advertising spent on it. It can still be enjoyable. Games will always be overpriced. Why doesn't **Edge** carry out an experiment.? I reckon most readers would be considered hardcore gamers and agree that you provide an outstanding product. Why not put the cover price up to £20 and get rid of those pesky casual gamer readers?

Raymond Russell,
via email

I have found heaven, in the form of a *GT40* flat out and singing through a Seattle street course. Now if that is not an emotional experience to you, you need help. Why can't all games be this good?

Julian Bowdidge,
via email

You're not talking about *Sega GT: Homologation Special*, are you?

I witnessed an interesting exchange between a father and son in a game store the other day. The dad was looking at a demo of *Gran Turismo 2*, his face alight with the thought of driving all those fantastic cars. He asked his son what it was. The son (who must have been around ten years of age) explained, adding: "But Nintendo will have a better racing game on the Dolphin."

What makes a kid that young so loyal that he would snub a very good game in preference to a system that has never produced a top-quality non-cart racing game for the N64 – when there is little evidence of what Dolphin can do? Was the boy conditioned by magazines? Peer pressure from his friends? Or did the Nintendo game really appeal to a younger audience? Kids could hold the key to the success or failure of gaming. Magazines like **Edge** can help promote unbiased thinking. (Maybe you could produce a kids' edition and call it **Edgelings** or something.)

Mark Philpott,
via email

Never underestimate the power of the playground. Without it, and the *Pokémon* phenomenon that dominates it, just where would Nintendo be right now?

It's sad to say but I think we've already seen the death of the Dreamcast. To a console the most important thing is its home territory, Japan. The N64's failure in Japan ruined its chances almost straight away. Why? RPGs. The N64 at Nintendo's stubborn insistence was a cartridge format, unable to hold the vast information required by Japan's staple-diet game genre. The N64 had no RPGs, while the PlayStation is getting more and more by the day (although not in the UK, unfortunately), ensuring itself a comfortable life. The Dreamcast has not seen a single decent RPG and looks like it won't, while the PlayStation is getting more and more, each increasing in quality.

With the PS2 getting Square and all its children along with many other established producers and titles, its success seems inevitable in Japan. Sega, however, seems to be pushing games exploiting its Internet ability (but hasn't, amazingly, picked up on a RPG/stategy title to do such), despite being unappetising just for the fact that they create a nice niche of their own. And who could forget the numerous arcade conversions – didn't Sega try this before and fail? Show a bit more initiative, Sega.

Oh, and as for the people who have bought a DC because they are supposed to be hardcore gamers and were wooed by *Soul Calibur*, what a load of tosh! If you are hardcore gamers you would realise you could pick up the not vastly different *Soul Blade* for the PS at £20 or less.

Only one game has made me look twice at the Dreamcast, yet I resisted. Why?

1. PS2 may outlive the rest.
2. My flatmate bought a DC in its first week with all the games, then took it back.
3. The N64 theory: When *GoldenEye* gets boring, *Mario* is seen to be a load of 3D pap, and we realise *Zelda* is no more than a lot of boring wandering.

Oh dear, Sega, you just don't learn from your own and other people's mistakes, do you?

Edward George,
via email

Is your middle name 'Controversial'?

> **'DVD lives in the land** of the tech head but the Internet is mass market. **Sony thinks about HDTV and broadband, Sega see VGA monitors** and Zip drives – that's a big pull'

Where now?



Next month, **Edge** goes under the hood of Sony's 128bit console, and speaks to the cream of the west's PlayStation2 developers to discover how the technology is being used to deliver a new breed of videogame. Plus: the definitive reviews of the premier PlayStation2 titles from Japan.

